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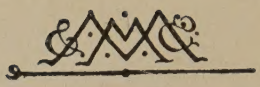

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PATHWAYS TO CHRISTIAN UNITY

A Free Church View

BY

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PREFACE

THIS book is written at the request of the Swanwick Free Church Fellowship. Though it is not the result of any general conference, and the writers alone are responsible for what is written, it is probable that it is in many ways a representative book. It is the result of much consultation outside the small circle of writers and it adopts a line of approach which is characteristic of the younger generation of Christians. Repudiating the dogmatic and often doctrinaire attitude of older controversies, it takes its stand upon experience and judges theory from that standpoint.

Seen in this light the Churches appear to be led by their ecclesiastical theories to pass judgments on each other which experience does not justify. Theory blinds them to their own defects, to the excellences of others and to their

common possession of a spiritual life which undoubtedly originates in Christ, and which is strong enough to be reproductive. Theory stands in the way of their mutual co-operation and fellowship, still more of their unity. Under such circumstances Charity and Truth point one way. They point to the ending of a state of isolation based upon theories in which evidently there is some flaw and to the re-examination of ancient disputes in the light of the further experience and opportunity for reflection which the centuries have afforded.

Turning back then to the New Testament (chap. 1) we find a conception of Christian unity that fits our need. It gives us every encouragement to advance from our present state of lamentable division (chap. 2) towards an ultimate visible union ; attempting in spiritual association to understand and express a fuller thought of the Church than has ever been embodied yet (chap. 3). We find the witness of Christian life and practice in contrasted types of Churches to be not really opposed but supplementary (chaps. 4 and 5), and we find a solvent for misunderstanding and estrangement in an ever-expanding fellowship of service and enquiry, registering its

progress from time to time in fresh constitutional forms of union or federation (chap. 6).

We conclude therefore with a confident and urgent appeal for the wide extension of local Christian fellowship and co-operation and for a studied attempt (chap. 7) to bring the separated denominations into formal union where that is already possible, and, for the rest, to make their thought and practice increasingly comprehensive till what is at present impossible shall itself come within their reach. For such a programme we believe the Church is ready in the providence of God.

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CHAPTER I

THE IDEAL OF CHRISTIAN UNITY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Of all the marks of the Church mentioned in the New Testament, that which is most insisted on is unity. It is implicit in every metaphor used; it is everywhere made essential; and its nature is expounded with a wealth of illustration. It is to be our opening task to correlate what the New Testament has to say on this subject, to analyse the nature of the unity which it proclaims to be essential, and to discover how that unity is to be maintained, or, if it has been lost, how it may be restored. In tracing the development of this idea we shall not follow the order in which the New Testament books were written, but while availing ourselves of all the relevant material, arrange it in that order which is most convenient for confronting the actual situation before us in the present divided state

of Christendom; endeavouring to elucidate the principles which should stimulate and guide the now happily growing desire for some further realisation of our oneness in Christ.

I. *The Unity of the Spirit.*

Since it is sometimes assumed that underneath our present disunion there may still be a real unity of spirit, it will be well to notice first of all what is understood in the New Testament by "the unity of the Spirit."[1] By placing the common phrase and the actual text side by side, we are at once made aware that there is more than a subtle difference between them. When we speak of unity of spirit, we often indicate a rather vague agreement which cannot be represented, but which we *feel* is there. But this is not the New Testament meaning. It is not a general attitude, or a vague feeling which makes the Church one; it is the unity of THE SPIRIT. The Church is one because it is animated by "the one and the same Spirit"[2] to whom it is impossible to ascribe either division or confusion. Since the fellowship of the Spirit is a reality, the Apostle can exhort the Philippians to be

[1] Eph. iv. 3. [2] 1 Cor. xii. 11.

" of one accord, of one mind " ; [1] the very kind of agreement which it is so often affirmed we can no longer hope to attain.[2] We are not even allowed to assume that there must necessarily be some falling away from the ideal when we endeavour to translate a " Spirit " into the actualities of human organisation. " There is one body, and one Spirit " ; [3] the unity of the Spirit perfectly represented in the corresponding unity of the body.

It is necessary that we should press this correspondence in view of the widely prevailing idea that, because we are in the flesh, because we have to deal with material conditions and human nature, unity is impossible in the earthly circumstances of the Church's existence. It is well to recall the facts that our faith commits us to the belief in the redemptibility of the body, and

[1] Phil. ii. 2.

[2] Doubtless we need to distinguish between intellectual and moral agreement. " The same mind " means the same way of looking at things, rather than necessarily the same way of stating things. For, as the context shows, the mind that was also in Christ Jesus was a certain attitude towards clinging to honour and power. Nevertheless it is just this same way of looking at things which we do not possess, and it is this which is the underlying cause of intellectual disagreement, or at least of that disagreement being so acute.

[3] Eph. iv. 4.

that the principle of the Incarnation rests upon the possibility of the very glory of God being manifested in the flesh. However difficult it be to realise, we must steadfastly refuse to admit that there is some insuperable incompatibility between spirit and body, between the ideal and the actual.[1]

II. *The Embodiment of the Spirit in the Church.*

This brings us naturally to consider that the Church is called not only a body, but "the body of Christ."[2] This undoubtedly commits us to a very high conception of the unity of the Church. It has been suggested that the Church is meant to serve Christ in the same ways as His own body served His incarnate life on earth; that the Church is, therefore, the perpetuation

[1] Some would perhaps call for a distinction between a Spirit-filled "organism" which may be one, and a human "organisation" which can never be. But it is impossible to press organism as against organisation in this connection. The Church, as a human society, is only an organism or body by analogy. The parts of which this "body" are composed are not unconscious members or cells, but conscious individuals; and if they are to share consciously in the functions of the body they must organise themselves for that purpose. It needs to be borne in mind, however, that the organisation must be true to type; it must not be mechanical, but that which provides for spiritual direction and personal response. See chapter 3.

[2] 1 Cor. xii. 27; Eph. i. 23; iv. 12; v. 30; Col. i. 24.

of the Incarnation, meant to render Christ visible, near, accessible, and to translate His love into acts of benevolence, healing and sacrifice. This is a stupendous claim, and it ought to be admitted that nowhere in the New Testament is this parallel between the Incarnation and the Church explicitly drawn. But is it not everywhere implied; and is it not demanded in the very nature of things?

The Church, which is His body, is said to be "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all."[1] This seems to imply that the Church is the fulfilment of which the Incarnation in Christ is only the beginning; and elsewhere St. Paul seems to suggest that the sufferings which he has borne for the sake of the Church go to supply something yet to be fulfilled in the "afflictions of Christ."[2] It would perhaps be going further than the words in their context actually sanction to say that the Church has to fulfil not only the Incarnation but the Atonement; yet it is certainly not until all mankind has been reconciled in one body that Christ's work will be complete; and to that blessed consummation the Church's whole endeavour

[1] Eph. i. 23. [2] Col. i. 24.

must ever be directed. At any rate, the world continually estimates Christ by His Church; or, if it discriminates, it still feels that a disunited Church proclaims the inability of Christ to complete His ministry of reconciliation, and it therefore feels at liberty to question His divine power; a conclusion which Christ Himself foresaw would be drawn.[1] Therefore, just as the unity of Christ's personality was displayed in the one body of His Incarnation, never to be repeated; just as that body perfectly expressed His will, and in its very weakness and suffering only the more vividly set forth the greatness of the Divine Love, so must the Church by its very constitution disclose the one body, if it would succeed in persuading men that there is also "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all."[2]

The unity of the Church is therefore due to the unity of the Personality who is its head; "for Christ also is head of the Church."[3] But there is an even higher unity suggested in the fact that the Church is herself conceived as a person, namely as the Bride of Christ.[4] In a recent

[1] John xvii. 21, 23. [2] Eph. iv. 4-6. [3] Eph. v. 23.
[4] Eph. v. 32; Rev. xxi. 2, 9; xxii. 17.

sociological treatise[1] it has been powerfully argued that the personification of a community or association is a false and dangerous exaggeration. It is maintained that there is no such thing as a communal soul; there are only the souls who make up the community. In strict psychology this is undoubtedly true, and it would be well if the distinction were properly observed; but the more closely a community is knit together, the more it conveys the impression of a *character* distinct from that of all or of any of those who compose it. The truth would appear to be that in close fellowship each soul is enlarged in itself by the vision of the whole, so that the totality of souls is, by that fructifying contact, more than the total of souls without it; even though it may not be strictly accurate to speak of the whole as possessing a soul apart from and above the souls that it contains. But it still remains that the Church has more right to personification that any other association, because it is indwelt by Christ, and used as the organ of His manifestation. It would be a pity, however, to subject this tender and beautiful image of the bride to any too strict psychological

[1] *Community: A Sociological Study*, R. M. Maciver.

or philosophical analysis. But we may perhaps see in this exaltation of the image of unity from that of a body to that of a personality, an indication of that unity which comes to the personality through the great experience of love. It is in her passionate attachment to Christ that the Church is kept one, and it is not beneath consideration whether the intrusion of other names, even of beloved leaders, may not have had some part in distracting the Church from her sole and only love. Certainly it is only by recovering an all-absorbing love for Christ alone, that we can hope for a fuller manifestation of the Church as of a "bride adorned for her husband."[1]

A symbol on a much lower plane, yet full of significance is that of the one loaf used at the Eucharist: "seeing that there is one bread, we who are many, are one body."[2] It is a pity that in one way or another, in nearly every current Communion rite, this symbol of unity has now been obscured; for the Eucharist, the chief act of corporate worship, the significance of which the New Testament is so concerned to make clear, ought to be a confession of unity.

[1] Rev. xxi. 2. [2] 1 Cor. x. 17. *R.V. mar.*

Alas, that not only in its symbolism, but in more important ways, it should have become the most eloquent token of our divisions.

We are therefore driven to the conclusion that the unity of the Church is meant to be as visible as the unity of a body, as real as that of a person consumed with love for one adorable lover, a unity which should be manifested by profound agreement in moral and mental outlook, and set forth in the central act of its common worship.

III. *The Diversity which is Compatible with Unity.*

But we must enquire what the nature of this unity is, and how far it is reconcilable with considerable diversity. And here we are met with the gratifying circumstance that the very image which has been most insisted on as symbolical of the unity is retained as also symbolical of the diversity. St. Paul has worked out the unity in diversity which is to be found in this human body with such detailed application to the Church that there is no need of any further exposition of the idea.[1] We need only sum up his exposition by pointing out that the unity of the Church is like the unity of the body;

[1] 1 Cor. xii. 12-30.

one body with many members but all controlled by the same Spirit; that the existence of many members can never produce schism in the body; that all must share in the suffering or health which befalls any one of them (v. 26). It is impossible for any one member to regard itself as not of the body, because it does not exercise the functions of some other member (v. 15 and 16), or for one member to think that its own function is the sole function of the body (v. 17 and 19), or for any one member to imagine that it can do without another (v. 21). And the fact that some members are more feeble cannot sanction the idea that they are therefore less necessary, or that those which are less comely should therefore receive less attention; for it is precisely the contrary which governs the disposition and care of the human body (v. 22-24). Finally, the unity of the body is secured by the fact that each member is directly related to Christ the head (v. 27).

The difference of function in the members of the physical body corresponds to the diversity of gifts and the difference of office which mark the members of the Church.[1] In the Apostle's

[1] 1 Cor. xii. 4-11, and 28-30.

exposition there is no distinct line drawn between gift and office. It was gift that constituted capacity for office, and it was the recognition of the gift by the Church which led to the establishment of formally ordered office. Nevertheless there must have been, and we know that there were, gifts that were so self-evidencing that they called for no formal recognition, but secured their authority by their exercise. For example, the Church did not appoint apostles, and the prophet was recognised solely by his gift : apostle and prophet therefore never becoming strictly localised offices in the primitive Church.

It has been sometimes argued that the various denominations of Christendom correspond to this diversity of gifts ; one branch of the Church is distinguished by its prophetic ministry ; another by its order and its official priesthood ; one branch of the Church emphasises works, another faith ; one specialises in government, another in freedom of utterance ; one denomination is famed for its fervour, another for its learning. And now we have a new sect which specialises in the gift of healing. The slightest enquiry will show that no such division is contemplated by the

New Testament. The members which are there distinguished by gift and office, are not denominations or even congregations; they are individuals. It ought to seem as unnatural for people of the same gift to unite to form a special Church for the cultivation of that gift as it would be impossible to imagine one congregation consisting entirely of apostles, another entirely of prophets, and another entirely of teachers. And although St. Paul does not explicitly warn us against any such false development, probably because it was unknown in his time and was too monstrous a notion for him to have considered as a future possibility, it has now become necessary to insist upon the elementary truth that segregation according to gifts is really impossible because of the wise economy of God which distributes them sporadically; and if specialisation of functions were attempted it would only lead to a most unnatural and one-sided development. Yet it is precisely this which denominations have attempted and sectarianism attempts to justify as rational. In consequence, the special concern or gift of one Church comes to be held in isolation, is often pressed to an unbalanced extreme, while other

Churches which need this just as much are denied even the correction which would be secured by contact. The Nemesis of this false idea is seen in the curious fact that in many cases the very gift or grace which a particular Church feels itself commissioned to preserve or bear witness to at length ceases to exist in that Church, save as a barren tradition. Thus the very purpose of the Church, which was intended to bring together individuals of differing temperament, gift and function, as members of one family, is frustrated, with the most deplorable results.

It is convenient to notice at this point other types of Church grouping which are expressly or implicitly forbidden by the New Testament. There is to be no grouping according to doctrine, observances, nationality, or social status : " there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman." [1] Splitting up into groups under the name of different leaders is repudiated as something approaching blasphemy ; " Each of you saith, I am of Paul ; and I of Apollos ; and I of Cephas ; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided ? was Paul crucified for you ? or

[1] Col. iii. 11.

were you baptised into the name of Paul?"[1] Neither do we hear of Churches being grouped together into a separate organisation because they exist in a defined locality: there is no Church of Galatia, or Church of Asia, or Church of Judea; there are *Churches* of Galatia and *Churches* of Asia and *Churches* of Judea.[2] These considerations seem to destroy all our apologies for division. The Churches of our times are therefore in schism; *all of them*. This being the fact, and repentance for that fact at last beginning to be felt, what can be done? Has the New Testament any programme for reuniting a divided Church?

In the nature of the case it can hardly be expected that we shall find any detailed and explicit guidance in the New Testament for uniting the Church, since it never contemplated its division. We shall not look therefore for any clear indication whether federation or corporate reunion is the right thing to aim at. But we may find certain principles of unity laid down which will be a help. It would be a definite help if we could discern what exact relationship existed between the Churches and the Church

[1] 1 Cor. i. 12, 13. [2] 1 Cor. xvi. 1; Gal. i. 22.

in the New Testament conditions. The evidence is not explicit, and the facts are subtle and difficult to characterise. But there seems to be agreement amongst scholars that the Church is not simply the sum total of the local Churches. "There is no grouping of them, (*i.e.* the local Ecclesiae) into partial wholes or into one great whole. The members which make up the One Ecclesia are not communities but individual men.[1] "The one Church is not an agglomeration of the many; but the idea which reflects itself in the many, and gives them their churchly character and name."[2] It seems to be taken for granted that loyalty to the Church as a whole is what everyone will feel; for as Christ is the head of the Church so He is also the head of every man.[3] Therefore neither formal federation nor corporate union was necessary to the Church of the New Testament because each individual clearly understood that he was knit into the one body by his baptism into Christ, and the unity was actually set forth by the "one faith, one baptism," and by the general

[1] Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia*, p. 168.

[2] Swete, *The Holy Catholic Church*, p. 12.

[3] 1 Cor. xi. 3.

custom to which St. Paul could appeal. But behind this mystical and unorganised unity it must be remembered that there were concrete unifying bonds, however unobtrusive. Chief among these was the personal leadership of the Apostles with their agreement in doctrine and custom, which in necessity could take such action as that of the Council at Jerusalem, which felt itself competent to issue an authoritative pronouncement upon difficulties that were dividing Christians. The sense of unity fostered by the Apostles was expressed and strengthened by means of the collections made by one church for another. The question of exactly how for us this unity is to be manifested seems to be fairly open as far as New Testament guidance is concerned. If real unity exists it should be easy to find its expression; and objections can only be raised if the expression proposed is of a nature that would destroy the unity or be of a different spirit. Therefore, in our present condition the first thing is to labour to secure *unity*, leaving *union* to wait upon its attainment; and for that the New Testament does offer us guidance.

IV. *The Building up of the Unity of the Church*

In the Ephesian epistle, so rich in its teaching on this subject, the Christian Church is compared to a temple whose building is being completed.[1] The simile is slightly obscure owing to an ambiguity in the rendering of "each separate building"; but it seems to picture a temple being built in different stages, the work progressing from various points; but as the building proceeds the place of each part in the whole is seen, and the unity of the plan made manifest. This seems to give us the sanction for attempting to build the one temple together by means of a plan carefully thought out, and agreed upon; the essential principles of which are indicated in the apostles and prophets being the foundation and Christ the chief corner-stone which binds all together. Therefore an attempt to draw the different denominations together by an insistence upon the foundations would seem to be more warranted than the plan of merely absorbing one Church into another. And this is confirmed by another idea set forth in the same Epistle,[2] where the unity of the Church is

[1] Chap. ii. 20-22. [2] Eph. iv. 12, 13.

spoken of as something gradually achieved by the perfecting of the saints and the deepening knowledge of Christ. These two illustrations ought to give us hope when we are sometimes tempted to despair. We ought not to look upon the uniformity of earlier days as a perfect unity which was disastrously destroyed; for it was not entirely due to deep knowledge of Christ and the perfection of saintly life. And if we are also unwilling to regard our present condition as the unity we were meant to have, then we may take heart and set ourselves to bring not only each Church but each individual to the full stature of Christ, certain that this will be the proper prelude to real union. That does however require us to abandon the denominational ideal, as it is usually pursued and defended, as completely false and mistaken. If any Church possesses anything which is true, that should be the possession of the whole Church; and what is not good for the Church as a whole is not good for any portion of it.

This method of advance is further confirmed by the supreme authority of Christ. There are hints of a similar basis of unity in His illustration of the Vine and its branches where the branches

are not Churches but members of the Churches.[1] But it is in the High-priestly prayer that the basis of unity becomes most explicit, and is set forth as altogether essential.[2] There it is shown that the unity of the Church is to be as real as the unity of Christ and the Father. It is to correspond to the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son (v. 21). This shows the method by which union is reached; not by absorbing the individual into a higher unity, but by each individual having an inner connection with every other. It will result in a union as perfect as that which is exemplified in Father and Son (v. 22); that is a union so close as to be indivisible, Christ indwelling the disciples and the Father indwelling both, so that the union is perfected (v. 23). This again outlines a process to be consummated through Christ more and more perfectly indwelling each Christian; the more Christ is in each, the greater the union realised. These passages all emphasise the thought that the complete individual appropriation of Christ is the way to real unity, and individual loyalty to the Church as a whole that which needs to be encouraged.

[1] John xv. [2] John xvii.

Here then is marked out the true line of approach: the deepening of the life of each Christian, and the obligation of every Christian to think of the Church as a whole and to strive for its perfect unity. It will not be concluded from this that all questions of organisation and reunion may therefore be shelved. As the individual experience of Christ deepens, so will the longing for perfect union with our fellow-Christians be intensified; and as individual loyalty to the one Church is quickened so there will be a demand for an end to denominational limitations. And it ought to be recognised that it is precisely these forces which are at work to-day and are calling for an outward organisation which shall correspond to inward fact. Finally, when we conclude that we must work from within outwards let this not be looked upon as a work that will go on simply by itself, or need only be undertaken at our leisure; rather let there be no rest or contentment until the end is achieved. For on the unity of the Church most momentous issues wait. It is only then that the world will believe that Christ was sent by God[1]; this belief will only then be something more than

[1] John xvii. 21.

a venture of faith and become a positive certainty: "that the world may *know*";[1] and only then will men be forced to admit that the Church has a divine mission and is loved by Christ as Christ is loved by the Father.[1] It is not therefore too much to say that until the Church reaches a perfect unity we shall be unable to comprehend the wonderful and mysterious unity of the Godhead; while only by faith in the divine Unity shall we be able to bring about the unity of the Church.

[1] John xvii. 23.

CHAPTER II

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

At no period since the Reformation has the importance and urgency of Church unity been so clearly and widely recognised as to-day. In this recognition there lies great promise of achievement, for in every quarter of the globe movements towards reunion are on foot. A conjunction of forces is pressing home the desire and the demand for unity.

In the first place, a more careful reading of the Gospels has made it clear that our present divisions are contrary to the mind of Christ, and that unity is implicit in the very idea of the Church. As Christ formed it, the Church was one, even as the Gospel is one, and God is one. A thorough-going examination of the Acts and the Epistles has left it beyond doubt that in the Apostolic Church, amid considerable diversity of type and polity, unity was regarded as an

essential note, a unity spiritual first but also visible and effective.

In the second place, the spirit of the age is a factor in what has been called the Catholic reaction. The new and ever deepening social consciousness, the great processes of unification going on in other spheres, are influencing that conservative body, the Church. It is becoming increasingly clear that in every realm, truth and right, strength and efficiency, lie not in competition but in co-operation, not in rivalry but in unity.

Thirdly, in the present world situation there is a clamant call for unity. The great and pressing task of World Evangelisation, and the vast problems caused by the war in every country of the world, bring home to us with a new intensity the real urgency of this problem. From our Christian workers on the mission field and in the Army and Navy, there comes a demand for a closing up of the ranks in face of the tremendous and aggressive powers of evil. There is in our hearts a feeling of humiliation and shame that, in face of an international crisis unparalleled in its gravity, the voice of Christendom as a whole has been inarticulate, and the one Church of Christ has failed to bear a corporate witness.

Whether we think of the claims of the past, the present or the future, we cannot escape the conviction of the urgency of unity among the followers of our common Lord. The nature and measure of the unity we desire will be dealt with in other chapters. We need only say here that by unity we mean not an external and enforced uniformity of creed and polity, not even at this stage a single organisation, but such a fellowship of the Churches as would bring with it a more vital realisation of our oneness in Christ and His atoning gospel, such a co-operation in thought and purpose as would give us a concerted policy in confronting a common task, and would provide effective means for expressing our collective will—and all that Christ may be enthroned as King in the life of the nation and of the world.

It is now for us to consider the importance of unity from several different points of view.

I. *Unity is demanded by loyalty to the mind of Christ and the teaching and practice of the Apostles.*

As the Christian Church is not a human institution but a divine creation, a question of primary importance is the measure of correspond-

ence between the Church of to-day and its ideal in the mind of Christ. As we have already seen,[1] Unity is an essential, not an accidental, element in the life of the Church ; it is not an aspiration from below, it is a revelation from above. "The Church is one in idea, whether she is one in fact or not ; her ideal unity from the first is inherent, transcendental, divine ; she is one essentially, as and because God is one."[2] We are not dealing then with a question of convenience merely, with a utilitarian arrangement, to save overlapping and wasteful rivalry. We are concerned with something deeper : the more adequate expression of the spiritual reality ; the fulfilment of the divine purpose.

The apostles and members of the early Church rightly apprehended the mind of Christ in this matter. The New Testament and all its writers bear a consistent witness to the unity of the Church. Diligence was exercised in keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and great pains were taken to prevent division. In the Apostolic age amid many diversities of gifts, varieties in polity, and differences in

[1] Chapter I.

[2] *Ministerial Priesthood*, chap. i. p. 6, R. C. Moberley.

doctrinal emphasis, there was a clear realisation of the oneness of the believers in Christ. The local Churches all recognised themselves as parts of the whole, members of the one Body.

This exposition of the teaching and practice of New Testament times has for us far more than an academic interest. The mind of Christ is regulative; His will is commanding. If we believe that our Lord meant us to be all in a visible fellowship, we dare not rest in our state of disunion. The one rallying point for united Christendom is common loyalty to the leadership of our Lord.

II. *Unity is needed to win the full devotion of Christians for the Church.*

There is no denying the fact that the life of the Free Churches has been impoverished by our low view of the Church. Our divisions are partly responsible; for within our denominational barriers it has not been easy to keep steadily in view the historical and the universal note. If in one village there are represented two or three sections of the Free Churches competing with one another, and if between them and the Anglicans there is more of hostility than of

sympathy, it is small wonder that the vision of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church is obscured. Amid our preoccupations with sectional interests and our emphasis on denominational differences, we cannot be surprised that among a great body of churchmen the idea of the Church no longer kindles imagination, nor evokes warm affection.

We must not confuse loyalty to a particular Church or denomination with loyalty to the one Body of Christ. For it is possible to develop the former with a negligible amount of the latter. Into our local attachments so many secondary elements enter—tradition, temperament, liking for a particular preacher, social conditions, family ties. The lower loyalty is insecure. It is not rooted in conviction, it lacks the passion of a great ideal. That is why a slight misunderstanding or a removal from a neighbourhood so often means a lapse from Church membership. And it will be so until the lower loyalty is sublimated into the higher.

It is imperative that we recover the New Testament idea of the Church, but this task can best be accomplished not in separation but in union. While it is true, as Dr. Forsyth insists

"that for a Federation of the Free Churches there is one signal and central requisite—a positive and effective theory of the Church,"[1] it is also true that such a federation would do a great deal to give us that exalted and commanding theory of the Church that is so necessary in the present situation. The removal of our denominational walls would increase the range of our vision, and bring into clearer focus the one Church of Christ in all its majesty and glory. A true unity inspired by the New Testament ideal would go far to make the idea of the Church really impressive, and to invoke a new reverence and a new loyalty. Often membership of a church is lightly regarded because we do not sufficiently realise that in the local church we are in vital touch with our living Lord and with the one body of Christ. There we are in communion with our fellow Christians the world over; there we enter into the Catholic heritage of the centuries in all its richness and variety; there also we have communion with the saints, the redeemed around the throne of God. This unifying ideal of Christ and the Apostles, this exalted conception of the Church, deepens

[1] *Church Sacraments*, p. 49, Forsyth.

the value and makes more commanding the obligation of Church membership.

III. *Unity is needed for the full development of Christian character.*

The Church exists that we might have life: the more closely it approximates to the New Testament ideal, the more abundant the life of its members. The pooling of thought and experience involved in a union not mechanical but spiritual would enable each section to acquire an enriched, because a more comprehensive Christian life. Fellowship with Christians of different types of piety, and of various grades of society, might call for the exercise of patience and charity, but the Church is meant to be a school for these very virtues.

In the days of the Apostles, people of the most marked natural antipathies, widely divergent in race, in rank, in culture, gathered in the same Church, and in the Cross of Christ discovered the secret of living together as brethren. There can be no doubt that the idea of a separate Church for a particular type of piety, a particular grade of society, a particular political colour, or a particular doctrinal emphasis, is not in line

with the New Testament. The mutual gain in a comprehensive Church, or in a federation would be great, as each section has something of value to bring to the common store; one supplies the lack of the other. We are coming to see with increasing clearness that the gospel of Christ is a bigger thing than we imagined, and that no section of the Church has more than a part of the truth. Every Church bears witness to some aspect of the gospel that must be preserved, flashes forth from its rude or polished surface some gleam of light that must be caught and lived by. There must not be one lost good. The days of division have not been all in vain. The story of the rise of the several denominations, while not free from the spirit of faction, adds some of the most romantic chapters to the annals of the Church; the story of zeal, of heroism, of faithful witness even unto death is not unworthy to be compared with that of the Apostolic days. While the Churches have been going their several ways, fighting for liberty, enduring hardship and persecution, every one has found some precious stone wherewith to adorn the temple of the Lord. And now we need the contribution of every Church, the manifold experiences of all

the disciples, that the several buildings may grow into a holy temple in the Lord, that we all may better apprehend the richly variegated wisdom of God, and may attain the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

IV. *Unity is needed for the fuller exploration and more effective proclamation of the Gospel.*

In these days we are learning the value of the corporate mind for the discovery of new truth. When the Churches come together in the communion of the Spirit, we shall not only be mutually enriched by sharing the stores we have gathered in isolation, but we shall have gained in capacity for searching out the unexplored riches of Christ. In a Church nearer the Catholic ideal, the One Spirit will have a freer and fuller course, and we may expect a clearer and more certain grasp of divine truth. "It needs the whole body of believing men and women to explore the riches of the Gospel."[1] In an enlarged fellowship, with a wider horizon and deeper sympathies, we shall enter into fuller possession of that spiritual heritage which is ours in Christ.

[1] *The World and the Gospel*, ch. ii., J. R. Oldham.

The gain in enrichment of life, and in comprehensiveness of view that would result from our union, would powerfully react on our proclamation of the Gospel. Christendom divided and distracted cannot worthily present Christ in His fulness. A Church split asunder into a hundred fragments cannot reflect the full glory of Christ; each fragment discloses but a broken image, and the full splendour of Him who is the Light of the World is not revealed. Our Lord in His High-priestly intercession prayed that His Church might be one, that the unity might be as real and intimate as the unity of Himself and His Father, in order that the world may believe in God's so great love. We are confronted to-day with a world which is largely unbelieving; the Gospel is slow in winning its way. The fact that there is something defective about our work and witness is surely one explanation of our failure. The Body of Christ in the world—the instrument by which He ought chiefly to accomplish His will—is a maimed body; our divisions have hindered the working of the Spirit of Christ, have weakened the proclamation of the Evangel; and so our differences are to some extent responsible for the unbelief of the

world. There is no unity among us that corresponds to the unity of the one Gospel and the one Saviour. In the one Church, one in Christ Jesus, one in the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, the one Gospel would be proclaimed with varying emphasis, with the varying accent of individual conviction, and yet with the weight and authority not only of the individual preacher, but of the whole Church. The trumpet blast calling men to repentance and faith would be sounded forth with greater clearness and more certainty.

What we need is that our partial, fragmentary, limited, conceptions of the Gospel may be blended into a glorious whole, that our proclamation may be soul subduing and triumphant, that Christ may be all in all.

V. *Unity is needed to demonstrate the possibility of human fellowship.*

The Church is set in the world to manifest to all men the possibility and the reality of true brotherhood. In Christ the middle wall of partition is broken down. Personal animosities, class jealousies, racial hatreds, are done away, and out of the discordant elements our Lord is creating a new humanity. By the spirit of union

that abides in it, by the love and fellowship among its members, the Church was intended to be a convincing demonstration of the power of the Gospel as a reconciling force.

The unity of believers is the most real unity known among men, a union not merely of feeling, of opinion, of purpose, but a vital unity, a sharing together in God of the one life of the one Spirit. The unity is reflected in the relation of branches to the vine, in that of the members of the body to the one head; it is a miracle rooted and grounded in communion with the risen, living, Christ. In this fellowship there is a promise of the breaking down of all barriers, and the dawning of the day of universal brotherhood. Any breach then in the body, any lack of union among fellow-believers, is the denial of the valid principles that the Church exists to show forth. One of the most tragic things in history is that the Church, which was meant to bring reconciliation and unity to the peoples, has often brought only strife and division.

In our day we are face to face with graver issues than have confronted the Church since the first century. Civilisation based on rivalry, competition, division, is in ruins. The new world,

if it is to be stable, if it is to be worthy of the tremendous sacrifices offered, must be built in co-operation, brotherhood, fellowship; but whence is to come the new spirit? Voices, loud, insistent, cry for spiritual leadership, and cry in vain. The words the nations need, the words the world waits for—reconciliation, peace, unity—the Church as one body cannot speak, for her own divisions are unhealed. There is something ludicrous about the Church pleading for unity among classes and races while denominational rivalries and even hostilities still exist. A divided Church cannot gain a hearing for its message of world-wide reconciliation; so this great emergency and unparalleled opportunity finds us unprepared and inadequate to meet the situation. The Church should be in the vanguard of humanity, pointing out the way by practical demonstration as well as by the living Word to that new earth wherein dwelleth unity and love, and to that kingdom which is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.

VI. *Union is needed to give fuller embodiment to the elements of unity already existing.*

There can be no doubt that the outsider, the man in the street, has an exaggerated view of

the disagreement and diversity among the Churches. Our divisions are neither few nor trivial, but our common inheritance is vast and rich. Greek, Roman, Anglican, Free Church—we worship the same God, we trust in the same Saviour, we commune with the same Spirit, we read the same Bible, we test our beliefs by the same Creeds, we administer the same two Sacraments. "There is one Body and one Spirit," "One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all." In Russia a layman holding high office in the Holy Synod said recently to an English traveller, "What is common to all the forms of the Christian faith is ninety nine per cent. Is it not the hand of the devil that makes trifles appear in our eyes as important matters?" It is not possible to estimate our agreement with arithmetical precision, and perhaps this is an exaggeration, but there can be no doubt that its extent and depth has not been fully appraised. The bane of denominationalism is that it leads to a distorted apprehension of Truth, overstressing points of difference, and this gives to quite secondary matters an importance altogether disproportionate to their real value. The emphasis on

order and rite, or again on freedom and simplicity of form, has obscured for us the riches of our common possession. This community in thought, in belief, in experience, in a common loyalty to Jesus Christ has never found adequate embodiment ; there is no outward symbol to express the inner unity, and the impact of the Churches on the world has greatly suffered in consequence.

Among the Free Churches the differences do not touch the vital things of our faith, the distinctions are no longer living issues. The war has set these differences in their true perspective, and we stand aghast at our own folly. To our brave men continually facing the great realities of peril and pain, of life and death, the things that divide the Churches, especially the Free Churches, appeared trivial and negligible. In parade services in France and Flanders where all non-conformists generally assembled together, and in the joys of Christian fellowship in little meetings in hut or trench, denominational barriers were not even thought of. To eyes purged by the fires of suffering, our sectional interests were branded as artificial and unreal, and an intolerable restraint on the free spirit of Christian fellowship.

The average worshipper in our Churches at home would find it difficult to describe the distinguishing marks of the various denominations. In order of worship, in hymnody, in exposition of the word, even in emphasis, the agreement is so great that it may be described as fundamental. Denominationalism in our great cities is regarded with growing impatience, and is ceasing to count. In our suburban churches, members are gathered from all denominations : the choice of a church in a new neighbourhood is determined more by proximity or liking for a particular preacher than by denominational loyalty ; and in these conglomerate churches there may be found a broader spirit of tolerance, a deeper and richer unity, than in many a church where all the members are of one particular denominational strain.

It is our hope that the barriers between the Free Churches and the Anglican Church are slowly but surely breaking down. Together we have faced common perils, together we have shared common sorrows ; in one place and with one accord we have met for intercession and for thanksgiving. In this more intimate fellowship between Anglicans and Free Churchmen,

there has come almost as a discovery a joyful realisation of the many things that already unite us. In the realm of devotional and theological literature, in biblical exposition and critical studies, the denominational barriers have ceased to exist.

These spiritual affinities, this oneness so intimate, so real, crave unceasingly for definite and visible expression.

VII. *Unity is needed to accomplish the present task of the Church.*

The Church was never confronted with problems so stupendous, the Church never faced responsibilities so vast, the Church never stood before opportunities so magnificent. Out of the chaos and welter of this world war there is emerging a kingdom of God, or a kingdom of the devil. Which is it to be? There can be no new world without a new spirit, and the Church exists to inspire the new spirit.

There is no hope for the world but in the kingdom of God, there is no hope for the kingdom but in the Church, and perhaps we might go on to say that there is no hope for the Church but in a concrete expression of the unity which is hers

at heart. Whether we think of the unprecedented openings for the conversion of the non-Christian peoples, or of the desperate need for the healing of international wounds, or of the fierce battle that is to be waged with paganism in our midst—in isolation we feel our utter inadequacy for the struggle.

At the Edinburgh Conference the evangelisation of the world was declared to be impossible without a greater measure of unity. "The Church is facing its tremendous task with scattered forces and divided ranks—confronting its gigantic tasks without concerted policy, adequate combination, sufficient generalship . . . The divisions within the Christian Church weaken the testimony and confuse the total impression made by Christianity on the minds of non-Christian peoples." And if the world's evangelisation waits on a united Church, so does the cause of the world's peace. In the midst of the great war the Church was painfully impotent. In St. Paul's Cathedral on America Day, Bishop Brent declared that only the visible unity of the Church of Christ would be competent to remove the obstacles in the way of the establishment of any kingdom of peace and righteousness and

love. The task of reconstruction is colossal. Our hope is in the redemption of society by Jesus Christ, and in the application of Christian principles to every department of conduct. The whole fabric of modern civilisation, social, national, international, must be challenged in the name of Jesus, and His followers must demand that society be rebuilt on the basis of His teaching. Who can issue this challenge, who can sound forth this clarion call, so as to arrest and compel attention? Not the Churches in their divided state, but the one Church of Christ must bear its clear, consistent, corporate witness regarding the Will of God for modern life.

The objective is so tremendously difficult that we must conserve all our forces. Every worker must be used to the utmost advantage, and unitedly we must press forward against the confederate hosts of evil. In view of the organised strength of the forces opposed to us, the dissipation of energy owing to our diversity, the wastefulness of overlapping and rivalry become not only a mistake but a sinful disloyalty to our common Lord. "The ugly and amazing spectacle of Churches and sects mutually hating and opposing each other would horrify us but for

the familiarity which has stupefied our minds and paralysed our wills." [1]

The task confronting the Church in the present age has been clearly revealed in the fierce light of the war; it is enough to dismay the heart of the bravest. The followers of Christ, now scattered and enfeebled by division, and faint-hearted in their isolation, must be rallied and united. In the comradeship of one great army, in close co-operation in one mighty enterprise, in a fellowship of witness and of suffering, we must taste afresh the Christian joy of communion in the furtherance of the Gospel.

[1] *Church Divisions and Christianity*, ch. ii., W. L. Grane.

CHAPTER III

THE GROUNDWORK OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

We who write this book desire the unity of Christ's Church on earth, because we believe that Christ Himself desires it, and that His mission to the world demands it. We long for unity because we know the spiritual weakness and loss we suffer for lack of it. We grieve over our disunity as those who are alienated from friends they love. Thinking and feeling as we do we should find no satisfaction in any unity that was merely formal or official. We want to see such a change take place in the thought and aim of the members of our Churches that a widespread spiritual unity will be realized amongst us all.

It is conceivable that there might be an official federation of organisations that would mean much in the saving of energy, friction, and expense, and make us more efficient in Church administration, and yet leave us in our individual

religion as poor and isolated and disunited as we are now. In saying this we do not wish to underrate the power of organisation to assist or retard the work of the Spirit. But organisation must correspond with its purpose or it will fail of its purpose. For spiritual purposes we need spiritual organisation. Until the organisation of the Church [1] is Christian through and through, it will be impossible by any schemes of Church federation or union to achieve the ultimate purpose of Christian union. It is at least a necessary part of that purpose that individual Christians and individual congregations should be richer in faith and devotion and more harmonious in spirit because they have been brought into true Christian fellowship with one another and with all the members of

[1] The word Church in common use means sometimes a building used for Christian worship, sometimes a single congregation of Christian people, sometimes an organised body of such individuals and congregations, sometimes the whole sum of these separate denominations. It is impossible to avoid the ambiguity to which this gives rise, but we have always tried to make clear the sense in which the word is used. It is never here applied to a building. When separate congregations are denoted the word is spelt without a capital. Denominations are spoken of as Churches. The Church is always the ideal and future Unity for which we work and pray.

the body of Christ. Christian union would be a fraud or a fiction if it did not both represent and engender a real oneness of spirit amongst the members of the Churches. It would have neither permanence nor power of witness to the real presence of Christ in the Church.

I. *The Recognition of our Oneness in Christ.*

The unity of Christian experience is in one sense the end and consummation of unity, for it cannot be realised until Christians have been trained in a Church living and acting as one. In another sense it is the beginning and guarantee of any unity at all, for there could be no cohesion in the organisation of the Church if this unity in spirit were not already there to build upon. Practically this unity of the spirit is present in germ in all Christian experience, as the power of reason is present in the mind of a child. By virtue of the contact of our spirit with the Spirit of God, in Christ, we all share in a common life derived from Him. Our religious experience, religious thought, religious purpose, all rest ultimately on Jesus. The possibility of our unity depends upon His communion with us; the realisation of it depends upon the freedom

with which we communicate with one another on that common basis.

The first condition of unity is then the recognition of the solid foundation for unity already laid. We must recognise and declare that beneath our varieties of Christian experience and the variations in our formulations of the Christian faith, there does exist a Life which we all receive, a Truth which we all apprehend, a Way which we all bind ourselves to walk in. We experience partially, we apprehend imperfectly, we obey faultily. But we all look to Jesus as the Way, the Truth and the Life. We do not need a precise identity of subjective experience, an exact agreement in creed, a complete definition of the obligations of our discipleship, to demonstrate or constitute the unity of our different Christian families. Even the agreement that can be stated in words is sufficient to prove that we are of Christ: He is our Head, and we are severally members of one another. We are in fact members of His one Church, and whilst we give expression to that membership by our life in a particular family, we want to insist that membership in Christ does actually and in spite of family differences and controversies make us

kinsmen with all Christ's people. It is indeed fitting that that essential unity and membership should be made manifest and effective.

In a word, the first condition of unity is the declaration that our oneness in Christ constitutes us one with one another in His Church, in such a real and vital and compelling sense that we have no business to pursue our separate courses alone. We belong to one another in the common quest for a fuller discovery of the truth as it is in Him, and a more faithful pursuit of His purpose for the world. It is a disastrous error to suppose that any one of us has a complete and perfect faith, or that we are adequate in our present condition to the greatness of the task of the Church. A greater conception of the Church would impel us to confess our deficiencies and seek a common life. Then, if we lived together more, our differences would become what they are meant to be, not sources of division but sources of endless stimulus and growth.

It is, however, clear that the dynamic power of this thought is only available for a movement that is bent on the complete and entire unity of the whole Church. Indeed, there can be no great passion for anything less. There can be

no great loyalty to a mere part of the Church, however large a part. Partial schemes of reunion are good in themselves but they will lack the driving power of deep religious faith unless they are all the time looking on to something more complete. We are not basing the Church on Christ, but only on our own imperfect conceptions of Christ so long as we are not prepared to seek alliance with *all* who profess and call themselves Christians.

II. *A great conception of the Church's practical responsibilities.*

It is not likely that the Church will attain to outward unity until it is more manifestly fulfilling its practical responsibility to save the world; nor is it desirable. We can only ask men's utter loyalty to a Church which aspires to do all that Christ would do for all the world. At present our denominational activities are hardly calculated to win the loyalty which the Church should claim of its members. We need a more comprehensive view of the Church's function in order to bring us into line with the magnificent conceptions of the New Testament. The Church must correspond with its ideal, not only in its

worship and teaching, but also in the practical scope and aim of its organisation. Only so far as it does this can it expect the wholehearted loyalty of its members. So far as the Church succeeds in winning such loyalty whilst it is pursuing a poor or low ideal, it does so at the cost of degrading and demoralising its members. There is a kind of partizan churchman who has grown careless of truth because he has been taught to claim for his own denomination, against all evidence to the contrary, all the powers and graces which will belong only to the glorious Church which is yet only an ideal. We know also the churchman who is the selfish member of a religious coterie because his Church has taught him not to spend his affections abroad. And probably we are all immeasurably impoverished in Christian hope and enterprise because none of our Churches have even tried to create equipment and organisation for their whole task—the evangelisation of the whole world; the christianisation of every department of social life; the perfection of Christian conduct and character in face of the actual demands of life. Our denominations and churches are organised far too exclusively for ministering to

their own wants, and far too little for the service of the world. Steps towards unity should be at the same time steps towards a more complete and adequate attempt on the part of our Church organisations to put themselves squarely face to face with the full range of the work of Christ.

This involves a great development of adult Christian education. Hitherto the Churches have not made any systematic or worthy attempt to educate the Christian conscience on many of the most important points of Christian duty in a world organised on a competitive basis, and almost unanimous in its praise of power and wealth. We are not pleading for ill-considered incursions into party politics: that needs no particular trouble or equipment. We are pleading for a concentration of thought on the modern problems of Christian conduct, comparable in strength, efficiency, and personnel with the concentration now given to the problems of history and theology. Any rearrangement of central staff and national committees which failed to provide the Church with a new leadership in this department of Christian duty would signalise the fact that the movement for unity was not

dominated by a living passion for the Church to be a vital organ of the body of Christ.

This is not the only side of the Church's duty for which it is ill-equipped and unorganised. There are other departments of its educational work for which it has no adequate provision; but this is typical and crucial, and brings out very clearly the points in which leadership and organisation are defective. The failure of Christianity to permeate the life of the nation is not only a reproach to individual Christians for failing to act according to their creed; it is a reproach to the whole organisation and system of our Churches for failing to guide and stimulate them in one of the most urgent and difficult departments of Christian duty; it is the condemnation of the Church's working ideal of itself.

A Church that properly conceived its mission to overcome the evil of the world should know more exactly what moral evils and temptations to evil spring out of our social conditions. It should have a clearer policy, and more idea of strategy in its warfare against these evils. It should be more watchful to discern new opportunities of service, and more competent to awaken the Church to its tasks. It should

provide its leaders with a better equipment for their work of leadership in these matters, setting apart some at least with special competence and adequate opportunity to lead the thought of the rest. In a word, the Church should prove its belief in its mission to transform society by the time and energy corporately devoted to that side of its redeeming purpose in the world.

Again, the Church needs better means of communication between its recognised leaders and its individual members and congregations, and better means of directing and co-ordinating their several efforts, so as to call out from each its due quota of service. For instance, the Christian congregations of a district should be more closely related to one another to secure a more effective co-operation in service. If our congregations were more occupied in thinking out together the best ways of serving their neighbourhood, they would have more authority to call upon individual men and women to render individual service, and the services rendered would be more in unison, more in accord with a single purpose, more representative of the whole mind of the Church, and therefore more effective, both as a contribution to social welfare, as a

means of fostering Christian unity, and as a testimony to Christ.

Does this open up a vista of organisation developed to a point where it might become spiritually disastrous in proportion to its very efficiency? Our desires for unity are often tempered by the fear of putting ourselves into the hands of a more powerful, clumsy and inflexible machine, insensitive to the finer issues of the spirit because of the very size and complication of its mechanism. But this means, too often, that we have not in view the right idea of organisation at all. Organisation and efficiency are not necessarily the foes of freedom and individuality. Yet until we have learned to organise so as to combine and not repress the varieties of religious thought and impulse represented among us, we are not ready for unity. Unity might be won at too great a cost if it were won without due recognition of the spiritual principles which ought to underlie all Christian organisation.

III. *Spiritual Organisation.*

Organisation is not a matter of option, still less a matter for indifference. There is a true

and right kind of organisation, appropriate to the spirit of our religion. We are bound to seek it, and having found it to establish it. Till we find it, there can be no perfect Christianity in the world except by rare accident. The right kind of Christian organisation fosters the right spirit, draws out the right qualities, and inspires the right energies in Christian individuals and congregations. The wrong kind quenches the Spirit, warps the mind, and stifles the impulse to Christian living.

The kind of organisation that both exalts the spiritual aims of the Church and makes for unity, is the organisation that is first and last an outcome and expression of the new relations in which Christians stand to one another. Those are relations of simple friendship. When fellowship is the watchword of organisation, "official" relations are lifted to the plane of personal friendship. Members of the committees and assemblies of the Church should realise that they are personal friends, made so by their common relation to Christ. In the sphere of religious truth and action there can be no understanding without personal sympathy and confidence. In science it is not so; in matters of the

intellect there can be unity of thought without unity of feeling. In a Church, however, there can only be unity when there is love and fellowship. And love is no more than a veneer of manners, unless it involves personal care and personal interest extending outside the sphere of specific Church co-operation. You cannot have Christian unity in a committee, if its members do not rejoice in one another's personal traits and care about each other's personal plans. Nor can you have unity unless there is general confidence in the sincerity and goodwill of all, and in the ability of each to contribute something of value to the common mind. Friendliness and trust are the great lack of almost all societies, both within the Church and outside it: the Church should be unique in possessing these qualities.

A vivid realisation of the personal presence of God in every assembly and in every soul is necessary to the attainment of Christian organisation. Do we truly believe in the presence of Christ with those who gather in His Name? Is it not rather the fact that our Church councils are often conspicuously weak in the spirit of reverent Christian joy in God's presence, in the

expectation of His guidance, in the realisation of a divine fellowship of the brethren of Christ. They are painfully subject to the pressure of official procedure, to the tyranny of the time-table, to the sterilising effect of formal resolutions, to the fear of awkward moments and unexpected issues, to the undue influence of men of eloquence and of reputation—intellectual, ecclesiastical, and even financial. We of the Free Churches have not demonstrated to the world or to ourselves that freedom from State control *of itself* secures for the Church the control of the Spirit in its affairs. We have not learned how to subject ourselves to the moving of the Spirit in the committees and parliaments of our churches. It is partly because we have not made enough of Christian friendship: our churches are many of them too big for their members to share a common life, and our assemblies and committees hardly attempt to be companies of friends. It is partly because we do not come together in a spirit of common devotion, to be "of one accord" as before God in all we think and say. And it is partly also because of our failure to recognise the dependence of Christian leadership and organisation in

our Churches upon the spiritual qualities which enable men to discern the mind of the Spirit working through the mind of man.

To return from self-criticism to exposition: the organisation of the Church should be an attempt to seek a revelation from Christ, through the working of the Spirit among companies of Christian believers prayerfully waiting for this very grace from God. Leaders should be men and women trained, indeed, to understand what the Church has stood for in the past and eager to keep the Church of the present loyal to the highest traditions of truth and right that it has ever perceived and attempted to follow, but eager also to discover what new paths the Church is called to tread. They should be taught to interpret the past by prayerful meditation even more than by careful research; and they should seek the guidance of the Spirit more from the fellowship of Christian people than from the workings of their own several brains. They are to be *interpreters of a living movement of thought in the mind of the Church.* They will often have to judge between the superficial and conventional mind of majorities and the devouter and deeper mind of those who make more of the spiritual

adventure of life. They are in trust to keep the ship they steer away from the shallows and out amid the deeper currents of their time.

For this we need far better, because more vital means of keeping leadership in reciprocal touch with its following, so as to stimulate *individual initiative.* Ministers, elders and deacons may be, and often are, as insensitive to the nascent thoughts and impulses of the rank and file of the Church membership as cardinals, bishops and general secretaries are often reputed to be. Those who hold any office in the Church should be in close spiritual relations with each other, and with all in the rank and file who are possessed of that prophetic spirit which is the initiating power in the Church. At present there is reason to think that the waste of inspiration and counsel in the Church is enormous. It is not only that the contribution of women is so little drawn upon, though that is a great matter. Whether they be men or women, those who have vision and thought to give to others do not find ready opportunity. Now and then a special commission in a Church or congregation discovers quite unexpected stores of thought and suggestion that are running to

waste. And there is much more lost because the individual members of our Churches are not stimulated to exercise initiative. Organisation and leadership are not for the issue of the mandates and *ex cathedra* utterances of a few, but for the circulation of ideas and impulses through the whole body of the Church, from whatever quarter they originate.

A more practical and comprehensive conception of the things with which the Church should be concerned would help to call out these unused Christian resources, and would lead to better means of *bringing new ideas to the test of discussion and experiment.* Of course the ideas and impulses of the rank and file need criticism just as much as those of leaders. At present we expect so little fresh light and inspiration in the Church that we provide no standing arrangements for receiving and testing new ideas, applying and expounding them for general use, freeing them from the limitations of their particular setting, and relating them to existing ways of thinking and acting. Christian truth needs thus to be reapplied by laymen to every phase of life in business and industry, social life and politics. Indeed every department of

Christian thought and action needs to be studied, and the resultant experience constantly collected and put to use throughout the Church, much in the way that the teaching of junior scholars in Sunday Schools is beginning now to be studied and taught. We suggest that if the Church would equip its members of both sexes with specialised training of this kind, it would create at one and the same time a far greater efficiency in every department of its work, a far wider variety of service, and a far deeper unity of life through the whole body of Christian people.

IV. *Christian Education.*

Unity of thought is to be sought further by educating Church members so that they are keen and intelligent on the matters for which and by which the Church exists. In a large and scattered body like the Church this work is most important. Just in so far as it is done, the special direction of each individual member's mind and will is likely to be valuable to the body, because continuous and harmonious with all that it already seeks and knows. Therefore the Church's true spiritual authorities, whoever they

are, living or dead, should speak far more systematically and continuously to the members of the Church on all matters of faith and conduct. We pay too little attention to the education of the members of the Church upon the *general* questions of Christian thought and action which are always arising, to have any right to expect success in reaching unity in any given company when some new and *special* issue has arisen.

(*a*) The foundation of everything is *education in Christian faith and doctrine.* What are the facts on which we base our faith, how have they been thought of in the past, how can they be thought and spoken of to-day ? The true basis of unity is a more thorough system of teaching people to think about the answers to these questions. The only final safeguard of the living system of Christian truth is systematic and vital teaching. It is equally the safeguard against the disintegrating heresy which is the bugbear of the Catholic, and the inert and sterile orthodoxy which is the bane of the Protestant Free Churchman. Such education should be modern in method and approach, rich in vocabulary, application and illustration, and

catholic in its inclusiveness and fidelity to history. As such it would be calculated to promote the rich unity we seek. Heresy and formalism both spring from insufficient reflection upon the fundamentals of the faith. Creeds may curb and check too rank originality for a time, the absence of creeds may stimulate originality where it flags, but only the give and take of sympathetic teaching and discussion can bring ultimate harmony.

(*b*) No less essential is a true system of *education in spiritual experience*. How is the presence of Christ to be sought? How is the impulse of the Spirit to be recognised? How is the soul to be trained to recognise and respond to the workings of God in experience? To secure unity, we must recognise both that there is great variety in Christian experience, and that the whole realm is yet one of law and order. The art of the devotional life can be taught; the intuitive faculties of the soul can be trained; general laws can be stated, and particular needs prescribed for. A free and broad treatment of these questions will make for wealth of experience and unity of heart. And once again, there lies in such training the true safeguard against

opposite errors—both against the emotionalism and onesidedness, which the Catholic fears, and against the dispassionate formalism which the Protestant fights. Education should indeed prove to be the true foster-parent of all the different religious experiences and convictions which have given rise to our different sects.

In these two sections of Christian education we are attacking the problems of disunion at their source. Differences of doctrine and devotional usage, differences, that is, in our theoretical and practical apprehension of Christ are the root causes of our divisions. We are separated in part because we misunderstand one another, and in part because we really disagree on issues which we shall never see quite in their true light until we have learned to share better the things in which we can be at one. It is through education that we may hope to remove at once our misunderstandings of each other and our several misunderstandings of the perfect truth. But for this it is important that the work of educating the members and ministers of our different denominations in Christian doctrine and devotion should be carried out to the very greatest possible extent under a common inspira-

tion, and on concerted lines, by men and women constantly working together in close Christian fellowship.

(*c*) Finally, in *the education of Christian Love and Loyalty* there is a still better opportunity for promoting unity. At present the Church relies chiefly on the business energy and business sense of newspaper editors and publishing firms, to provide its members with guidance upon most of the great problems of Christian action which arise from the complexity of modern life. Here and there religious teaching blackballs some particular form of amusement or business occupation, or sallies forth against some particular public evil. But there is hardly any systematic training provided for those who would like to know how Christianity applies to modern social practice. Whilst this is true, the Church as organised here on earth, has no full title to the respect and loyalty of its members ; they must seek elsewhere for inspiration and guidance on matters of the greatest moment to them as the disciples of Christ.

We are caught now in a vicious circle, at any rate in our British Churches. There is little readiness on the part of Christian people to train

for Christian service or give weight to Christian teaching, because Christian service is insufficiently organised, and Christian teaching is ill-equipped. We are most of us dabblers in a variety of forms of Christian service—social, missionary, administrative, evangelistic, educational—and masters in none. We have not enough training and confidence in any one branch of Christian activity to appreciate the value of a trained judgment elsewhere, and so we do not trust the judgment of others in matters where our own knowledge does not go. Both loyalty and leadership are therefore at a terrible discount among us, and for that reason we are amongst the most incompetent of social institutions, having the most antiquated equipment for our social task.

Unity will have an incomplete motive unless the reformation of the Church's practical teaching is included in its aim. Here the Churches have a task in which they might well co-operate from the first—for we are all alike in having as yet made hardly any attempt to gather together the material for instruction and organise it into a systematic body of truth, and there is nothing to prevent our acting together but lethargy and a certain unanalysed ethical bias of each body

toward a particular type of political thought. Moreover the joint experiment in co-operation might have very valuable results in leading to fuller unity later on.

Genuine reformation requires the energising force of new undertakings. We believe that the Church might create its fresh forms of unity incidentally and as a bye-product if its leaders and committees would together attempt to make the Church efficient in its primary tasks. The tedious problems of administration, and the nice and difficult adjustments of matters in dispute, would be dealt with all the more easily if there were other and greater things being achieved at the same time. Unity is created not so much by the settlement of old quarrels as by the creation of new interests and relationships, in which the old problems take a new perspective and resolve themselves almost without conscious thought.

CHAPTER IV

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE FREE CHURCHES TO THE CATHOLIC IDEAL

THE spiritual heritage embodied in the life and practice of the Free Churches, contains much that must have a permanent place in the Holy Catholic Church. It is hard to believe that these Churches could have occupied so large a place in the history of modern Christianity if they had not supplied a need in the life of men, and expressed some truth of God which either in form or content was insufficiently emphasised by others. The Free Churches came into being through the inspiration of positive experience, truth, and duty. These were often defined in controversy, but they were expressed and propagated in witness and service that enriched the religious life of men. And if the time has come when we should seek a clear vision of the Catholic Church, we must include the precious things of

Christ which are embodied in the Free Church tradition and thereby held in trust for the whole body of the people of Christ. Amid the great variety of attitude and tendency, and the great wealth of religious experience preserved in our tradition, there are certain salient features which reappear in all the Free Churches. It will be well to define these, to define them at their best, so that we may see what must be taken into the unity towards which we are moving.

I. *The Evangelical Experience of Christ.*

Central and essential in the life of the Christian and the witness of the Church is that spiritual experience in which the soul comes into personal relations with God in Jesus Christ. Since the days of Wesley, this has been called the "Evangelical experience," but with differing aspects it can be identified throughout the history of the Church.

Two main types are clearly distinguishable though they are ever shifting one into the other. The majestic conceptions of God, Man, and Sin, which the Church inherited from the Old Testament are fundamental for both types. The sovereignty of God is absolute. His Law pro-

ceeds from the thunder and the clouds of the Mount that might not be touched. His love is a consuming fire, and on His holiness no man can look and live. In the presence of the All-Holy, man is a ruin, impotent in the grip of original sin until God Himself provides a way of escape. He does provide a way and it is in the Cross, through which man is redeemed.[1] But here at the point of personal appropriation by the individual soul a difference of type emerges. With the one, man is helpless in himself until he is saved by the grace that comes through the atoning work of Christ. In sheer trust he takes this into his soul, is snatched from the wrath to come, and is adopted into the family of God. This type we see largely in one side of St. Paul, in Augustine, Calvin, and the Calvinistic Puritans.

On the other hand, we have another type, a contrast though not a contradiction, one in which the same conceptions of God and man are present but all modified by a rapturous apprehension of the personal love of Christ. We see it in the other and more devotional side of St. Paul as also in St. John. It is present too in Augustine,

[1] R. H. Coats, *Types of English Piety*, p. 68.

and still more in St. Bernard and St. Francis and other mediaeval mystics. It is marked in Luther and is the gift of the Moravians to the Wesleys, inspiring the tender yearning and the triumphant passion of their hymns. Here the experience starts not so much with a sense of sin, though that is never far absent, and emerges strongly later, but with a sense of God and His love revealed in Jesus Christ. The soul awakes with wondering eyes to the infinite love of God which dawns upon it. It is a new consciousness, as when love comes, or rather the Lover from whose presence we should shrink in our unworthiness, but that with irresistible mercy, He draws ever nearer and nearer to the heart. The day when Wesley felt his heart "strangely warmed" was a new beginning for him, for which all that had happened in his soul before was mere preparation. Such new consciousness of the life and love of Christ is more than feeling: in it feeling, thinking, and willing, all have their place. As we awake to the beauty of the light of day, and all the world to which it opens our eyes; as from dull indifference we come to love, and are thereby ushered into a new kind of life, rich with new hopes and concerns, new purposes

and new joys, so the soul awakes to a new apprehension of Christ and the life to which He calls us. It is not of our doing though maybe there was struggle in the earlier process. It is Christ who has done it.[1] He came into the soul. He has given not merely forgiveness and joy, He has given new life. We are born again not of the flesh, nor of human will, but of the spirit of God.

In the Free Church tradition, since the Methodist Revival, this has been considered the normal passage by which the soul comes into the Christian life. Our great preachers have been almost invariably the men in whose hearts some such process has been experienced. It has always been a common feature in religious revivals. In those who joined the Church it was expected that there should be signs of some approximation to it; and the Christian minister in receiving a candidate for Church membership would seek amid endless variations of expression, until he found them. We confess that at the present time, this demand is not so consistently made. The experience is there in the Church, it is assumed in our preaching, it is heard in our prayers;

[1] *The Ordeal of the Church*, p. 17. Student Christian Movement.

there is no doubt whatever that in the whole witness of the Church, it must have a central and radical place; but the insistence that it should be reproduced in the individual has slackened. This distinctive thing which drove the Evangelicals so far into the van of religious life that the slow-moving main body disowned them, is no longer central with them. The standard behind which they rushed upon the world that, without it, was "without God and without hope," has been lost, or handed on to the Salvation Army, the local mission or the sporadic revivalist.

We cannot conceive of the Church doing its work in the world save by the regenerative power of the Gospel. And if there is anything we would like to bring into the life of the whole Church, it is this grasp of the essentials of the Gospel of the Cross, and the power to proclaim it effectively to all sorts and conditions of men. The thought of the growing unity into which the Church is coming, reacts upon us in quickening our desires and our prayers that the evangelical faith and zeal which marked our forefathers may distinguish their sons, not for the sake of denominational extension but for the honour of Christ,

the efficiency of His Church and the salvation of mankind.

II. *The Experience of Christian Fellowship.*

Out of this view of the nature of the Christian life comes the Free Churchman's view of the Church. That life which in its mysterious beginnings is the gift of Christ in the soul, finds its affinity in others who have received the same gift. Given in the Christian community, there too it is cherished and nourished: it is trained and developed in the home into which it was born. Its experiences are strengthened and enriched as they are found to repeat and reflect the experiences of others. Doubts are scattered in the light of the maturer faith of friends. Discouragements and temptations lose their power in the society of those who tread the same way and together turn for daily sustenance to His grace, by which they were born anew. The community of those who share this experience of Christ and by the power of His redemption seek to live the Christian life together, is the Church.

Such fellowship is the medium in which further experiences of Christ are given, supplementing and reinforcing those that come to the individual

soul. As to the individual so to the group, Christ is present, giving to the Christian social consciousness qualities that are never found in any other social grouping. The consciousness of unity, the glad expansive affection in which all difference of individuality becomes our common enrichment, the inspiration that comes to one, and is recognised and claimed by all, the kindling of thought as mind speaks to mind of the precious things of Christ, the revealing of the holy will of God, as with "stops" and "concerns" the restraints and constraints of the Spirit, declare the way: these are some of the things, poorly expressed but richly experienced when two or three are gathered together of one accord and in one place. The presence of Christ is in the midst, deepening our love, directing our ways, prompting holy impulses, bestowing the joy of the peace that passes understanding. "The solitary and contemplative life" said Lancelot Andrewes to Henry Barrow, when he was in prison, "I hold the most blessed life. It is the life I would choose." Barrow's reply witnesses well to the ideal of the Church for which he was suffering. "You speak philosophically" he said, "but not Christianly. So sweet is the

harmony of God's grace to me in the congregation and the conversation of the saints at all times that I think myself a sparrow on the housetop when I am exiled from them." [1]

To like effect is Dale's description of his own experience. "To be at a Church-meeting apart from any prayer that is uttered, any hymn that is sung, any words that are spoken, is for me one of the means of grace. To know that I am surrounded by men and women who dwell in God, who have received the Holy Ghost, with whom I am to share the eternal righteousness and the eternal rapture of the great life to come, this is blessedness. I breathe a Divine Air. I am in the New Jerusalem which has come down out of heaven from God, and the nations which are saved are walking its streets of gold. I rejoice in the joy of Christ over those whom He has delivered from eternal death, and lifted into the light and glory of God. The kingdom of heaven is there." [2]

This ideal of Christian fellowship is common in the best Free Church tradition. Early Congregationalism was a direct and definite attempt to establish a pure Christian fellowship

[1] *Cit.:* Selbie, *Witness of Evangelical Churches.* [2] *Cit.: Ib.*

as against the idea common in the sixteenth century that membership of a nation constituted membership in a national Church. The secession from a national Church was in quest of the apostolic idea—a Church which should be a true Church because its members were "in Christ." It was in the interest of the quality of the fellowship that the separatist groups were so strict as to the condition of entrance into the Church. It was in the fellowship of Christian people that the Presence was manifest, and it was by the Presence that the fellowship was led out into new ways of thought and life.

III. *A Biblical Basis.*

In the Free Church tradition, the Bible has always occupied a place of central importance, because it was the Book of the Gospel, the Old Testament preparing the way for the New, and the New Testament providing the classic expression of the Christian life. Although it was often used by people, and even by communities, in forced and mechanical ways; although the doctrine of verbal inspiration tended to equalise the moral values of all its parts and erected the Bible into an authority for all sorts of un-christian

positions, nevertheless its centrality in the life of the Church has been, and will remain, of permanent value, because it keeps before the mind of the Church the *historical revelation* of Christianity. In its pages the devout reader, untroubled by critical questions, or in spite of them, is taken back to the time when Jesus lived and died and rose again. Here on this earth, in human form, and among men of like passions with ourselves, God manifested Himself in Jesus Christ, saved them by His Gospel, and sanctified them by His Spirit.

But the Bible is not simply the history of a people, and the biography of Jesus and His apostles. It is not what now-a-days we call scientific history. This may be granted. As Jülicher says, "Had Mark attempted to write such a model biography as historical science demands his work would have been useless for religion." It is important therefore that we should see the kind of history it was. It was *a history of the Gospel.* The Gospel was before the New Testament, and by making the men and women whose story it contains, created it. Its *dramatis personae* are not sketched for their own sake, but for the sake of the evangelical testimony

they exemplify. And this is indeed history. It is the history of souls living in the power of Christ their Lord and Redeemer, thinking about God and man in the light of the knowledge of their Lord. Through their thinking, as through their life, is presented the history of the act of God in Christ. Their theology is not of final value as theological dogma, but as a presentation of their experience. St. Paul, for instance, at times careless of theology strained language and commandeered all manner of ideas and figures to set forth what his heart had found, first on the road to Damascus, and afterwards along all the roads by which Christ had constrained him. It is the graphic word of the Gospel, picturing what the Gospel did to make the character and mould the thought of men, and build the Christian community, that is the sovereign element, the sceptre of authority in the New Testament.

It has been of inestimable value that the Bible has thus held us to the historical origins of our Faith. And this not merely for the sake of those "who bind the sheaf and build the house, and dig the grave," and have not the power or opportunity to grasp the subtleties of thought.

To these plain men and women the scenes of the New Testament, the stories of Jesus, the history of the apostles have brought the truth home simply and directly. Beyond this, however, in preserving the historical ground-work of the faith, the Bible has had an important regulative and directive influence on Christian thought. It has prevented the evangelical experience from being dissipated in mystical vagaries. In one sense the experience is mystical because personal, but the moral reality at the heart of it has kept it steady and sane, and the influence of the New Testament has held it close to the realm of life and fact by keeping before our eyes the classic examples of the experience of the apostles. Christianity could not become merely subjective, vague, metaphysical, or pietistic, with such an authority. It must remain positive, realist, and moral.

The centrality of the Bible has exercised a similar influence in counteracting the tendency of religion to become a mere philosophy. Never more strongly than to-day has the power of this tendency been felt ; and it can only be met by a better understanding of the purpose of the Bible, and a re-enthronement of its authority for faith.

There is a movement going on to reject the historical basis of the Christian religion, not merely on account of critical difficulties but on the plea that the historical element is no more than the symbolic presentation of religious ideas, and that if these ideas are grasped the so-called history does not matter. But in cutting away the critical difficulties, this would destroy the actuality of religion for life, it would cut an artery and bleed religion to death.[1]

Not only has the Bible been our safeguard against subjective mysticism and unhistorical idealism, but against credal authority also. Credal authority is the authority of precise definition, and it tends ever to demand a merely intellectual assent, which is of little value for religion. Where men have used the Bible as a creed is used, the result has been utterly confusing, because the value of the Bible lies in the fact that it is a glorious story book, a fascinating picture book for the soul. It is a portrait gallery of the prophets of God. It presents a panorama of the Christian life in the story of the Saviour, His Apostles, His Church. It is inspired because it inspires. Only the intellectuals can interpret

[1] Selbie, *Aspects of Christ*, pp. 3-38.

the creeds, but the villagers of the fourteenth century could revel in the Morality Plays which were frequently based upon the Bible and the creeds. The Bible Society sends out the book to nations and tribes of every stage of civilisation, never fearing that their crude interpretations will demoralise them. The "poet-preachers" of Wales and the local preachers of Wesleyanism had a way of romancing round biblical incidents, re-setting them in the lives of their villages, and by such free and uncritical treatment have brought the characteristic inspiration and power of the Bible to their people.

Instead of a system of ideas then, or a code of morals, or even a doctrinal creed, the Free Churches have found their *inspiration* in the Bible. Through their own experience of what God was still doing in themselves, they approached the history of what He had done. Thus the Bible was the book of experience, in which their own experience of Christ and of the fellowship of the Church, was brought to the classical test which at once sifted it, interpreted it and sanctioned it.

IV. *A Prophetic Ministry.*

Our conception of the ministry is so closely related to what has been said above that for all the limitations which are felt in current practice, we believe it to be an ideal for which the Church Catholic must find a place if its functions are to be perfected. Its model is in the Apostles as men sent out to speak the experience that had come to them; and as for us, the source as well as the form of that experience is in the Bible, the ministry is based on the Bible, and is a ministry of the Word of God.

The minister's prior duty is not with the problems of thought, or conduct, or society. It is not the criticism of life, nor the presentation of his views on religion or morality. These have a place in his preaching, but he is expected to come at them from one centre—the revelation of God in Christ. His aim is to set forth Jesus Christ. He has the moral needs of men before him; he speaks out of the experience that lives in his own soul; he speaks from the Bible; he speaks on behalf of the Fellowship in which even as he speaks Christ is a Living Presence: thus he offers Christ to men.

It is this experience of Christ which gives continuity in the ministry, as indeed in the Church. The Free Churches are as conscious of a succession as are the other Churches. If that succession has never been elaborated into a doctrine like that of the Apostolic Succession, it is because it has always been taken for granted. Nor in all our communities is it symbolised by the laying-on of hands at ordination. But it is there, held in its place not as a completed system of ritual nor even of thought, but by the power of the Church to recognise the authentic word of the Gospel as it is preached.

After the Apostles had done their work and entered into their rest, their witness remained embodied in the New Testament. To them in the first place the Life had been manifested. They had been the friends of Jesus. They had seen and handled the Word of Life, and this blessed experience had made them a holy fellowship. But the manifestation was not for them alone, nor did they think of their fellowship together with the Lord as an exclusive privilege. As they faced the world and the future their passion was that men should share its blessedness. As one of them said "this we declare

unto you that ye may have fellowship with us whose fellowship is with the Father and the Son." Into that Apostolic fellowship and the succession which the perpetuated experience of Christ in the Church guarantees, the minister is called and ordained.

V. *Inspirational Worship.*

The "Order" of worship in the Free Churches is an expression of these ideals of the Christian fellowship and the Christian ministry, as truly as the form of Catholic worship is determined by the Catholic conception of the Church and the priesthood. With us the forms are less rigidly fixed; and though the order can become as set by the influence of tradition and custom as when prescribed by a Service book, yet it leaves more room for the free movement of the Spirit in personality to determine its content. It is in view of this that we speak here of "inspirational worship."

There are of course elements in our order which are observed in common with the practices of other Churches—the singing of hymns, the chanting of psalms, and the reading of the Scriptures. But there are certain marked

differences, as, for instance, the *free* prayer and the importance attached to the sermon. The justification for both of these, and especially the first, is the assumption that in the assembly of Christian people, the Spirit of God is present, giving an inspiration that no prepared order is of itself sufficient to contain. It may be, as George Herbert so naturally felt,[1] that this gives place for disorderly things to occur, but we would contend that the Spirit of God uses the means at His hand, and there is a place in worship in which, with what language and ideas it has, the soul must utter itself under the prompting of that Spirit. The perfection of forms imposed with all the appealing authority of ancient usage may not be so true a prayer as those crude and imperfect forms which are the spontaneous but genuine utterance of the heart. The prayers in the prayer-meetings of the Free Churches may be lacking in form, but they are not without a dignity of their own. The "meetings" of the Quakers are without set order, but there is an order which the Spirit makes.

Even in the larger assemblies gathered for public worship on Sundays, the tradition of the

[1] George Herbert, *The British Church.*

"free" prayer is maintained. It is the most difficult and exacting duty for the minister leading the worship; but nevertheless it would be admitted by most to be, when rightly fulfilled, perhaps the most moving and inspired moment of the whole service. At its best, it is not the speech of a man praying for those assembled together: it is the united soul of the whole community finding utterance through one who by virtue of his knowledge of the congregation, and sympathy with them, and, above all, by the power of the Presence in the midst, represents them in far more than any formal or official sense. The Spirit kindles and fuses, and all are one in Him, whilst the people pray with and through the one who leads. He knows it is not his prayer; nor the people's prayer: it is the prayer of the Holy Ghost.[1] The minister is a High Priest in the priesthood of all believers.

In the Free Church, the *sermon* is given a very prominent place, and it is often criticised as having a place out of all proportion with the other parts of the service. But in our tradition the sermon is not something extra to the worship. It is a part of it, an essential if not the essential

[1] Cf. *Life of Dr. Dale*, p. 246.

and central part. It is the Word conveying the Gospel. It is a sacramental thing, a means of grace. As in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, symbols are used by which to proclaim the Gospel and communicate grace to the soul in faith, so the sermon in the truest sense is intended to be the proclamation of the Gospel, uttered by a visible witness, as the prime medium of the Word of Life. As it would be claimed that Christ is in the consecrated bread, so He is in the inspired and inspiring word of His living witnesses. If in any sense congruous with the Gospel the priest "creates Christ" in the elements for the people, still more the truly called and inspired preacher "makes Christ live" for the congregation. Invariably do our people know when this has been achieved. John Wesley's phrase was, "I offered Christ to them." As one writer has said "In Free Church life and thought the place of the High Mass is taken by the sermon . . . It is a setting forth of Christ Crucified and Risen. It is in very truth an Elevation of the Host. The sermon is the spoken word, the High Mass is the visible."[1] "God is assuredly nearer in

[1] Art. by Nath. Micklem in *Concerning Prayer*, p. 323. Cf. Dr. Forsyth. "The preached Word . . . is a creative sacrament

the Gospel than Christ in the bread and wine," said Luther. It was this lofty view that gave to the sermon its place in worship, and when this view is realised the sermon becomes veritably a part of the worship.

As in the case of free prayer, so in the preaching, the influence of the " fellowship " enters into the making and the delivery of the sermon. Both in his preparation and in his speaking, the minister is looking into the faces of his people and into their hearts. He comes from God with His message, but he has received it upon a soul that represents the fellowship, and as he speaks it out, he knows that he is speaking *for* the fellowship, not merely *to* it. To relate the truth of the Gospel to their lives in such a way that the fellowship must endorse it—that is his joy. To utter for them what in their deepest Christian heart they would have uttered—that is his authority, the authority not of his own appeal or genius, but the corporate authority of the church in which he ministers. It is easy to meet the wants and whims of people rather than

by the medium of a consecrated personality," *The Church and the Sacraments*, pp. 132, 134. This book is a profound and illuminating statement of the ideal Free Church position.

their true needs. Popularity often lies that way. But there are "those who know," and these it does not satisfy. As from the priesthood of believers the minister draws inspiration to offer up prayer to God, so from the Christian body in which Christ dwells, he draws like inspiration to proclaim the Gospel to the world.

VI. *Spiritual Freedom in Polity.*

One of the outstanding features of the Free Churches is the freedom they have exercised in shaping their polity and the great variety of form which their polity has taken. Historically they are called "Free," and in the general view they keep that name because they are officially free from the control of the State and from legally prescribed orders in organisation and worship. But there is a fuller meaning to the word than this. The principle is that the Divine life in the Church is to be unhampered by any alien coercion, in order that it may express itself in forms best suited for its purpose. On the one hand is the ideal. This is absolute and to it we are bound, though it must be confessed that it is seen as yet but in glimpses and the perfect view waits for our obedience to the revelation given.

But, on the other hand, is the earthly environment in which it is to be realised, and there we are free, free to exercise any adaptability that shall be the due social expression of the Divine life. The life within must determine its form in relation to the environment. The Spirit given must weave its garment out of the material that is at hand.

Thus the principle of freedom does not mean that the Free Churches consist of people voluntarily associated for the purpose of worship and service. The condition of membership carries with it the recognition of the Lord who creates and rules His Church. Nor does it mean that our apparent self-government is a democracy. We are "free" in order the more freely to obey the Head according to the light that is given. We own the absolute authority of Jesus Christ and His revealed will in the Church assembly: we seek His guidance in every adaptation to our environment. Nor was it mere self-will that caused our chief secessions: it was the presence of life that must in loyalty to its source express itself in satisfactory forms, either by modifying old forms or shaping new.

It must be admitted that there are many risks

attaching to a position so idealistic. When the spiritual life of a Free Church runs low, its theocratic self-government under the Headship of Christ degenerates into a democracy which may mean merely government by a majority. When its love grows cold it becomes isolated. When its traditions have grown old and stale it drops into a formalism that is without even the apology of beauty. When it loses sight of its classic models, and, as may easily happen in time of religious doubt and theological uncertainty, when it strains from its base in Christ and the New Testament, there is little to prevent it from becoming a mere religious club moved by the spirit of the time more than by the Spirit of God.

Whether or not those Churches which are held in a system of stricter tradition, form and organisation, are really saved from such possible lapses, one thing seems clear to us, both from principle and practice, namely that it is not the control of the State that can secure spiritual vitality, and it is in the interests of the Church as a whole that we witness to the ideal of a Church which is free from such control. It seems to us to be the enthronement of an alien authority in the Church of Christ. It shares, if it does not chal-

lenge, "the crown rights of the Redeemer." It may give a measure of social prestige, a place in the legislature of the country and other privileges. But these are gifts not of Christ's ordering; in return for which the Church surrenders her disinterested influence as a moral guide of the nation. It hampers brotherly relations with other Christian bodies. In relation to industrial, economic and social relations at home, it helps to bind her to things as they are, and whenever the State is at war, it bespeaks her interest in the national cause, and cuts at the heart of any international view.

VII. *The Zeal for the Kingdom.*

But the freedom of the Church from the State does not imply any diminished interest in national affairs. It does not mean the surrender of its corporate witness. In the history of the Free Churches there has been a great deal of corporate witness and activity, both in the political realm and beyond it. History clearly shows how the struggle for ecclesiastical and civil freedom naturally involved the Free Churches in a measure of alliance with the progressive political party; and as these old

battles have been won for the most part, the Free Churches are left in a traditional alliance with that party, without the justification that originally established it. Of recent years it is increasingly felt that such political alliance has grave drawbacks. The witness of a Church as a Church on an ecclesiastical question, *e.g.* Disestablishment, is legitimate, though even here there is something very disquieting in the use of political instruments to coerce one branch of the Church of Christ to the ideals of another. Without any surrender of principle, ecclesiastical bodies ought to find some other way. But the general adherence of a Church to the programme of one party in state affairs is liable to abuse and misunderstanding and may even promote confusion as to the functions of the State and the Church, and prove stultifying in practice for religion. It tends to limit a religious community to people of one interest and outlook, whereas the Church should inspire ever new groupings in a long, consistent influence of reconciliation.

By "the zeal of the kingdom of God" we mean that zeal which carries men on far in the van of social amelioration, where the slow moving political machine cannot yet come. Without

neglecting the duties of citizenship, and while taking their individual responsibility in politics as a part of their Christian duty, it is chiefly into these realms of social reform that Christian men and women should press. Inspired by a Christian ideal and commissioned by the Christian "Fellowship," they should by their Christian way of life vindicate the power of the Church as the moral guide of society. Politics is only a rearrangement and a tidying up of material in hand; religion is the generator of moral and spiritual life and the inspiration of original thinking and original activity which shall reclaim rebellious lands for the kingdom of God.

Looking back into our history we can clearly see that the evangelical faith has created, attracted, and fostered a type of character which has exercised a great influence among men. It has developed the sense of moral responsibility and duty, trained the qualities of independence, self-reliance and resolution. It was by no easy passage that the Puritans found their peace, but by the lonely struggle with God like that of Jacob by the brook. They had no aids such as the Catholic has, no external authority in a Church, no intermediary in a priest. It

was for each man to lay bare his conscience in the Holy Presence and gird up the loins of his mind to do business with God. Their religion was intensely personal, and "in its exacting discipline were trained men who were often narrow and intolerant but at the same time strong and serious, firm in resolution, steeled with conviction, unswerving in purpose, believing themselves to be the predestined instruments of the Will of God." We know the type too well to require exhaustive delineation. And from history we know too its power to withstand all authorities of society, state and Church, in obedience to the authority of faith.

In the later Evangelicalism we see the same vigorous type—men not now, however, driven by the inexorable Will of God, so much as lured by the passion of the love of Jesus. The same individualistic note in religion produces similar initiative and venture and idealism. "It is one of the paradoxes in religious history," says Dean Inge, "that this individualistic type of Christian should have carried out nearly all the social reforms which can fairly be set down to the credit of the Christian religion. Catholicism never abolished slavery, and never would have

done so. It was Quaker philanthropy which awakened the conscience of Europe to the horror of the old prison system." [1] "Christianity," says Martineau—again no partial observer, "has never manifested itself in so affectionate, disinterested and energetic a spirit as in Churches which, like the Evangelical, lay great stress on the doctrine of justification by faith." [2] One need not name the great societies formed under the influence of the Evangelical revival, or repeat again the great names identified with great causes which make some of the noblest chapters of nineteenth century history, or show how they derive their impulse from the Evangelical tradition.

Is all this of the past? We cannot believe it. It is not indeed true that the moral ardour of the Free Churchman is exhausted in party politics and in the faithful labour which works out in handsome fortunes. But at the same time it is appallingly true that no one outside the Churches, and but a very few inside them, think that the Church contains even in embryo the power for the reconstruction of society.

[1] W. R. Inge, *Types of Christian Saintliness*, p. 53.

[2] *National Duties*, p. 122, *cit.* Coats, *Types of English Piety*.

Though we may not doubt that in Christ the challenge of the world can be met, and through Him man and society be saved, not without a profound reformation of the Church can the power be liberated which is commensurate with such vast tasks. In faith we dare to look for such a reformation, and the story of the past encourages us to anticipate the emergence of new types of saintliness which will express in thought and in life the power of Christ in relation to present needs. In that reformation the truest of the things in our tradition will be requickened from the death into which they have almost sunk. The redeeming energies of Christ shall pour through the redeemed heart and will into all our social duties and relations. The fellowship of the Church shall be such a triumph over all the things that separate type from type, class from class, nation from nation, that the world which cries out for fellowship shall see the ideal embodied before its eyes and turn to ask its secret. With the Holy Will of God for their rule of life, men shall follow the way of Christ, so utterly subversive of the ways of the world. With faith that it is God's good pleasure to give them the kingdom, and with the sacrifice that

surrenders all, they shall go forth into all their commercial and industrial life inspired by the same motives which drive and sustain the missionaries in foreign lands.

These are the main elements, as it appears to us, which distinguish the Free Church tradition. We have stated them as ideals, quite conscious of our frequent failures to express them satisfactorily in our life and practice. As ideals they are very precious to us, and the fear lest our faulty presentation of them should have made it impossible for other branches of the Christian Church to recognise them as things that truly pertain to Christ and His Church, deepens our longing for the quickening and the renewal by which, we believe, they would be recognised as notes in the witness of the Church Catholic, indispensable in themselves and ready to blend in the great harmony with which the universal Church should present the Gospel to the world.

CHAPTER V

THE CONTRIBUTION OF CATHOLICISM TO THE FREE CHURCH IDEAL

It will very generally be agreed by those who have given thought and prayer to the problem of the re-union of the Church, that any real and catholic[1] unity must include every genuine Christian value and experience, in whatever quarter it may be found. Even those who hold most strongly that unity is only to be achieved by the general adoption of some one of the existing forms of Church organisation, would admit that there should be a place in such an organisation for every authentic form of Christian witness, whether at present enshrined in a separate Church or not. There has been in recent years an increasing amount of sympa-

[1] The word catholic is used frequently in this book in its strict literary meaning as comprehensive or all-inclusive. It is then spelt with a small c: with a capital C it is used of those who have shown their zeal for the idea by claiming the title.

thetic study by both Catholics and Protestants, by Anglicans and Non-conformists of each other's religious life and practice, and it may be that along this line of mutual understanding and sympathy in regard to the spiritual values of Catholicism and Protestantism the most hopeful progress will be made.

Needless to say, in this there is nothing incompatible with the genius of Free Churchmanship. Thoughtful Free Churchmen do not now hold, whatever may have been the case in the past, that the unity of Christendom is to be attained by the conversion of the non-reformed Churches to any of the polities and modes of worship associated with the Free Churches. They hold that the particular principles associated historically with the several Reformed Churches were, at least in the chief instances, of sufficiently vital importance to make even schism necessary in order that they might be conserved. The continuance of the divisions of Christianity and the existence of separate Free Churches they defend, however regretfully, on the ground that without the existence of these separate communions certain vital truths might be obscured or even forgotten. Nevertheless their testimony

is not made to-day in a spirit of exclusiveness. They conceive of themselves as holding in trust for an ultimate catholic unity those spiritual traditions, truths and principles, from which their own life is drawn. In that catholic unity they are prepared, nay, they long, to see also represented and included the Christian witness of other branches of the Church from which they have been long estranged.

It is necessary therefore for Free Churchmen to approach those great and historic Churches with which the name Catholic (in the narrower sense of the word) is associated, not as mere rivals or competitors, but in a temper of loving and reverent enquiry. This does not mean that vital issues are to be burked and important differences slurred over. The Free Churches owe it to Catholicism, as well as to themselves, to criticise Catholicism in the light that God has given them; and there are elements in Catholic thought and practice which Free Church life must repudiate in loyalty to what it has learnt of Christ. These differences become especially clear when we regard the system of thought and the philosophy of religion which underlies Catholic practice. The conception of

a sacramental grace so divorced from evangelic experience as to achieve its work of regeneration in the baptism of infants is one which not only Baptists but Free Churchmen who practise infant baptism must necessarily reject. It is difficult for them to find any room for agreement with a theory of the priesthood which finds the warrant of the priest not in the priesthood of all believers, of which his ministry is the organ, but in "valid order" conveyed by an "Apostolic succession" which they regard, not only as historically dubious, but as spiritually incompatible with all that they have learnt in Christ of God's working in the world. We take these two instances as types of a divergence in principle which it would be mere sentimentalism to obscure or conceal.

We do not, however, regard a polemical statement of this difference in Protestant and Catholic conceptions as the prime need of the hour; and not only because it has been done frequently and adequately already. What is most needed, in our belief, to-day is an earnest and consistent effort on each side to understand the spiritual experience into which the other has entered. Too often the Protestant

is so repelled by what he regards as the monstrous doctrine of the Catholic, or by some interpretation of a rite, that he debars himself from the opportunity of understanding the spiritual comfort and enlightening which the Catholic receives through his worship. The same is true from the other side. There is need for much more sharing of experience if our doctrinal controversies are to have any value. One can read a Catholic book on doctrine and feel completely repelled by it; while none the less one may experience something in Catholic worship which is unmistakably real and forces one to the conclusion either that the theory has been misunderstood or that it is only a defective attempt to articulate the intellectual aspect of a genuine spiritual reality. There is much work waiting to be done in this realm of the restatement of Christian doctrine in regard to the Church, orders and sacraments, but it must be done by Catholics and Protestants, Free Churchmen and Anglicans together, on the basis of a far greater community in spiritual experience than exists among us to-day.

With a full consciousness, therefore, of the differences which separate these two great types

of Christianity, and without the smallest desire to minimise them, we return to our defined task, which is to try to evaluate the Christian graces, Christian truths and Christian practices which are to be found in Catholic tradition. We have to consider how far they have been obscured from our view by our own protest against error, and how far they complement our own Christian witness, and enrich and widen it.

The argument of this chapter, it may here be noted, proceeds on the assumption that, despite vital differences, the typically "Catholic" spirit may be discerned either in the Eastern Churches, in Rome, or in Anglo-Catholicism. The last of these, however, is for Free Churchmen both more accessible and more easily intelligible than the others. At the same time it gives the Free Churchman some insight into the Roman Catholic position, at least on some sides of it, which is important if the problem of unity is to be comprehensively faced, and is difficult to attain directly. Further, it has seemed best in this chapter to confine attention to the definitely Catholic position, although we are well aware that many Anglicans occupy a position midway between Catholicism and the Free Churches.

I. *Catholic Inclusiveness.*

One of the commonest charges made against the older or Catholic churches is that by reason of their exceedingly mixed character, their emphasis upon baptismal regeneration, and the apparently small demand they make upon the life and character of the average individual, they tend to lower the whole standard of Christian discipleship. Into this question, with its wide ramifications, it is not proposed to enter here. There is, however, something to be said on the other side. The tendency of what has been described as our "fissiparous Christianity" has been to accentuate temperamental affinities and to gather together in one communion mainly persons who, though they may exhibit great differences, are yet united by similarity of temperament and conviction. The Catholic conception, on the other hand, with all its drawbacks, does at any rate hold up the ideal of the Church as a great community of all sorts of people, as a school in which because the pupils are so diverse they can all learn from one another. The greater homogeneity of our Free Churches has the corresponding drawback that it gathers

together those who are already alike. The Catholic idea maintains a more broadly human or catholic conception of the Christian society. A leading secular American journal recently suggested, in the course of an article on Christian Unity, that if the Methodists and Catholics could be united, while the Methodists would put "drive" into the Catholics, the Catholics would "civilise" the Methodists!

The only real case that can be made against the "mixed Church," the *corpus mixtum*, is that which is made by a Church really purged and really consisting only of earnest and devout Christians. But must we not confess that all our Churches are *corpora mixta*, and that in this respect we only differ from the Catholic practice in degree? Most dangerous of all is the tendency of Free Churches to aim at attracting people of a single type, and that not a spiritual or religious type but a social or even a financial one. When "Church extension" is discussed, how often it is the prosperous suburb that is sought after, not the poor or decaying district; how often we hear it said that "the people have moved further out," though the neighbourhood may be seething with humanity. Whatever may be said against

the principle of the mixed body (and much may justly be said) nothing too strong can be said against the tendency which would substitute for a spiritual qualification the criterion of worldly compatibility.

II. *The Sense of Historical Continuity.*

The ancient communions maintain an emphatic testimony to the unity of the body of Christ's followers on earth, and to the mighty unbroken succession whereby that body is linked with the earliest days of the Church's life. The responsibility for different schisms which have broken this unity, may, it is true, lie at the door of those who remained with Mother Church as much as of those who separated or were cast out from her ; and this sense of outward unity and historic order may be preserved, it can well be argued, at too great a cost. Yet the ancient Churches maintain an ideal to which we must give our assent, and which has real value for our Free Church life. The Catholic feels himself to be united with the Church of the early centuries in a bond of common life and unbroken communion, of which continuity of organisation, particularly through episcopal succession, is

the symbol and not the essence. The very buildings in which he worships convey this sense to him, unless he himself be made of stone. His religious life is lived in a great community, stretching over the world and through the centuries, in which he is at home and with which he feels himself to be one. The Saints of the Church are near to him, to whatever age or race they may belong. It is a thousand pities that this sense of spiritual continuity should have been so much confused with questions of historical succession and mechanical order. At the same time, in repelling doctrines of order which seemed to be false to the nature of the indwelling Spirit of God, Protestants have largely lost a spiritual reality which might be theirs.

For it can hardly be denied that they have lost it. Speaking generally, Free Churchmen have little sense of unity in the Church of Christ with the saints and martyrs of the earlier centuries. A Free Churchman may feel himself spiritually kin to Wesley or Bunyan, even to Luther or Calvin; he will only by a conscious effort realise his kinship with Augustine or Ambrose. We have often found keen students of foreign missions to whom the missionary

enterprise is largely a blank between St. Paul and William Carey. When in the ancient hymn *Te Deum Laudamus* we sing of the glorious company, the goodly fellowship, the noble army, we do not attach to this mighty language its full richness of meaning, because of the limitations both in time and space to which our Church-sense is subjected. The temper of our Church life makes it difficult for the average member (the case of the scholar or historian is different) to think naturally and readily of the old martyrs, scholars, saints and prophets of the Church, as being of *his* fellowship, *his* Church, *his* army. Is it not possible for us to learn something from the Catholic communions in this regard, for the enrichment of our spiritual life and the glory of our Lord ?

III. *Authority in the Church.*

It is often stated in controversy that the Catholic witness is to the authority of the Church, and the Protestant to the authority of the Holy Spirit speaking to the individual conscience. Broadly speaking, this distinction is true. The Catholic insistence is on " the faith once delivered to the saints," the Deposit of Faith which is to

be maintained inviolate by the Church and assented to implicitly by the Christian. The Church is a teaching body. To it the "Mysteries" have been entrusted; it is the voice of God on earth, and the individual's duty is to listen, receive and obey in those matters at least which are declared essential to the faith.

The Protestant witness on the other hand goes back through the "prophets" of the New Testament to those of the Old, with their personal illumination and "call" for the reform of the common consciousness of God's people. The Free Church emphasis is on the duty and right of "private judgment," on the sacredness of the voice of God speaking in the stillness to the conscience of the believer. Obedience to authority of an external type may conflict with this inner voice: when that conflict comes about, a man must obey the will of God as he believes it to be revealed to him. To the genius of Protestantism an infallible Book is as alien as an infallible Church. In either case there is a further court of appeal, the voice of God in the heart.

Yet such a diagnosis is in reality a statement of two complementary positions. The truth

about authority in religion lies in neither, taken by itself, but in a combination of the two. The conception of Church authority occupies an important place in the Christian view of life. Although the Free Churchman can never admit that obedience to the Church, speaking through its accredited officers, is an absolute duty for the Christian man, he cannot say either, with his eyes on the New Testament, that only the conscience of the individual Christian can be invested with authority. Let it be granted that in the last analysis it is to the individual that authority, whether of Church or Book or Experience, must speak. Through what medium does the Spirit of the Divine reach the individual spirit, quickening and enlightening it? Through the written Word of God, as a man in humility and prayer seeks to understand the revelation of God there set down for him. Through the history of the Church and its leaders of his own day, as they together with him seek to interpret the will of God for the age in which they live. It is as the individual allows the Bible and the Christian Church (corporately and individually) around him, and also, as far as may be, the Church before him, to speak their message to him, that he is

conscious, surely and fully, of the voice of God and recognises the leading of the Spirit.

The dangers of a complete abandonment of authority are not imaginary. They are exceedingly real. One instance may suffice. Certain branches of Free Church life have shown an instability and fickleness in regard to doctrine which are nothing less than lamentable. Men write off the whole dogmatic history of the Church as a farrago of mistakes and errors, and seek to reconstruct the Christian faith in almost total disregard of the lessons of history. It is not obscurantism but ordinary regard for history and for scientific method that repudiates such a course. It argues at least as much intellectual bondage to say that only the new can be true as to say that only the old can be true. The Roman Church with all her rigidity, and her often obscure and unmeaning dogmatic formulas, has never *denied* the faith; and her dogmatic stability has something in it for the admiration of all.

Free Churchmen can therefore attach a valid meaning to the authority of the Church. To them the witness of the Church in past ages is a guiding hand pointing towards the present and

the future. They will not regard it as in all things it has laid down infallible, nor shrink from the labour of seeking continually for the peculiar voice of God to their own time. But they will hold it as rash and foolish to ignore the testimony of the past, and they will expect the guidance of God, which they seek, to be revealed to them in the complex situations of modern days, as they study reverently His workings in bygone days with the saints who were before them, and as they endeavour to translate these lessons into terms of modern life.

IV. *The Spirit of Worship.*

The considerations already suggested lead us to another, less fundamental, perhaps, yet in practice significant, namely the insistence on *reverence in worship* which is characteristic of the best Catholic spirit. Obviously reverent worship is not a distinctively Catholic possession. It is not even specifically Christian, inasmuch as it is to be found also in the practice of the non-Christian religions. Yet Christian worship, just because it is the worship of the one true God through His complete self-manifestation in our Lord, ought never to be devoid of, nay rather

should always be conspicuous for, the reverence with which it is rendered. It is not too much to say that in this matter the average Free Church service of public worship falls gravely short of the standard set by Catholic practice. It is not merely a matter of symbolism in worship. Symbolism is undoubtedly a powerful aid to worship for many minds ; but extreme and even barren simplicity may equally be so ; and we have to confess that judged even by its own standard of simplicity of form and absence of symbolic accompaniment, our Free Church worship too frequently lacks in reverence, and tends to substitute other things for the spirit of worship. An ornate liturgical service may be, and doubtless often is, irreverent, and there is such a thing as a drilled reverence which is not worshipful. Nevertheless it is undeniably more difficult to dissociate the spirit of reverence from a Catholic office or from the Anglican Liturgy than from our Free Church services. How often have we all heard the remark in extenuation of imperfect preaching in certain pulpits—" At any rate, there is always the Liturgy " ! This fact indicates not so much a difference in outlook between the Anglican clergyman and the Free Church

minister, (to take that instance,) as a difference in historical tradition and in the cumulative effect of that tradition upon worship at the present time. Every man who conducts public worship is to some extent at least, it may be to a very great extent, limited by what his people are used to and expect; and we are the heritors of a tradition which has so emphasised preaching (which, truly conceived, is an act of worship) that worship has been made of less importance, and even periods of prayer are marred by the homiletic habit. One of the main reasons for the hold which both Romanism and Anglicanism have on masses of the common people is the awe which their ritual fosters; and it is to be feared that our Free Churches lose some of their choicest spirits, as well as many who are only conscious of a dim desire to bow before the Unseen, simply because the spirit of worship is not strong enough among us. It is not suggested that the Free Churchman's duty is to borrow a ritual from the Catholic, but that he should study more intimately the meaning of worship, and learn more from his Catholic brother of the spirit which informs his system.

The particular element in worship which

Catholicism as compared with our Free Church systems, tends to foster, is the *mystical emotion.* Many descriptions have been written lately of the spiritual condition of the Russian peasant worshipper, and we are told of the deep mystical devotion which is aroused in his heart by the celebration of the "Divine Liturgy" after the Orthodox manner. The same is true of the Roman Church and of Anglo-Catholicism; and there are certain types of Christian who are inevitably driven into one of these folds, wherever they may begin their spiritual pilgrimage. These types, however, represent only one kind of reverential devotion or even of mystical emotion, namely that stirred by an aesthetic appeal to the senses. There is another type of devotion, of a more reflective and contemplative order, and yet in a sense mystical also, which has been marvellously explored by the Society of Friends. Perhaps it is to this type that our Free Church worship at its best most nearly approximates; certainly our sacramental worship is more reflective than aesthetic. Yet here too the Catholic can help us, for the contemplative Orders have a long experience of the possibilities of meditative worship, and the practice of what is called

" mental prayer," worked out with characteristic thoroughness by Catholic professors, has much to teach us even of those modes of devotion which are most congenial to our own temper and training.

V. *Eucharistic Worship.*

We have not yet, however, faced that element in Catholicism on which the good Catholic would himself lay the greatest stress. The *Eucharist* is the heart of Catholicism. If it had been less important, it would not have divided Christendom. Practical discussion of reunion, even of measures of comity between Anglicanism and Non-conformity, is almost immediately brought up against this rock of stumbling, and we are reminded again and again that the sacrament of brotherhood has been turned into the most potent instrument of division. Is the cleavage ultimate, or can the Free Churchman find anything here of permanent spiritual value, which his own practice omits or only partially expresses ?

Anyone who has had really intimate discussions with a Catholic over this question will realise what the Mass means to him. Where so much has been said, no attempt can be made

here to do more than single out two vital aspects of the subject. In the first place, the Eucharist is made the key to the sacramental view of all life. In the consecration of the elements, the bread and the wine, common things of human use, the Catholic sees the taking up of all life and labour into communion with God, and, as it has been put, "the welcome of God for, and His association of Himself in most intimate immanental love with, His world." The Eucharist is thus the supreme symbol of a truth which can be applied to all life. The ultimate meaning and glory of all life are to be found in this, that it was made for union with God; of all matter, that it is indwelt by a Spirit of which it is the vehicle.

The practical importance of this principle is sufficiently obvious. Let us take for an instance the difficult question of sexual purity and the marriage relation. Of all the ways of impressing the Christian view of sex upon the mind of the average man, has any been found so effective and so far reaching as that which sets out the relation of body and soul as sacramental, and sees in the physical relation the vehicle of a spiritual love, which will be degraded by a loveless or animal abuse? What folly, to talk medical

terrors to a boy, when he might be led to conceive of his body as the temple of the Holy Ghost!

The second aspect of the Eucharist of which something may be said here, is the belief of the Catholic worshipper that God is before him in special and real presence, to worship and adore. This is the key to all his thinking about worship and his practice of it. His mind is impregnated with a sense of the *reality of God*; that He is there, though the worshipper be weary or casual or indifferent; that His nature does not change; that His presence and His love are not limited by the spiritual perceptiveness of the worshipper. It is true that the Protestant conception of the Holy Communion contains a doctrine of the Presence of Christ at least as profound as that of Catholicism. The pity is that it is so vaguely held, so little believed, so weakly taught. To very many Free Churchmen the Communion is not a means of grace at all. They do not enter into the conviction of the great Reformers, that in the Communion of the Lord's Supper they have a special experience of intimate fellowship with Christ as atoning Lamb of God and Source of Divine forgiveness and life to His members.

There is great need that we should return upon our own doctrine and understand it more fully.

It has often struck some of us as a highly ironical thing that in discussion between Anglo-Catholics and Free Churchmen, at least of the younger generation, the point is often made by the former that they stand for the " objectivity " of God, for the fact that His presence with us does not depend upon what man thinks about Him, whereas to the Protestant the main thing is alleged to be man's apprehension of God and the spiritual experience awakened by God in man. The irony of this situation is manifest when we recollect that if there was one thing upon which the Reformers insisted, it was that the grace of God is not conditioned by man, and that salvation through Christ is God's free gift to men who are utterly without desert. Yet we have many men on the Catholic side honestly believing that they have to maintain their witness to what we have called the " objectivity " of God's gift and grace, against the subjectivist tendency of Protestantism. This fact demonstrates how beneath apparently divergent principles a unity of spirit may be present; and it is at least the conviction of the writers

that Free Churchmen will find themselves recalled by a careful study of the Catholic position to spiritual values of their own which may have grown dim.

This sense of the objectivity of God's grace realised in sacramental forms and even in forms which to the Protestant mind may sometimes appear idolatrous, enables Catholicism to gain the attention of the common people by a concreteness of approach which we cannot but envy, dangerous though we may think it, and perhaps too facile in its concrete realism. The sight, a common one in any continental cathedral, of an old apple woman putting her candle on the stand, lighting it, and kneeling a few moments before the shrine in the midst of the day's work, makes one wonder whether it is by a spiritual necessity that our more reflective religion has nothing as easily apprehended to offer her. To the Reformers the Word was, as to the Catholics is the Mass, the sign and vehicle of the free grace of God. Can it be denied that in our Protestant practice the Word has come to mean only too often an intellectual presentation of religion, which it is difficult for many an uneducated man or woman to comprehend.

VI. *Confession and Absolution.*

Another Catholic use from which the Free Churches may perhaps learn something is that of confession and absolution. The idea lying behind the practice of confession and absolution is that the Church has power to loose and to bind sins, and warrant for this is sought in the words of our Lord. Is there not a true sense in which we can say that the corporate Christian judgment should be able to condemn sin and to pronounce forgiveness, as being the representative on earth of the mind of Christ, the Body in which the Spirit is indwelling? The individual Christian should be able to gain help and strength in dealing with his sin through the fellowship of the Christian community, being fortified by it in self-condemnation, and comforted and assured by it as he looks to God for forgiveness. Moreover, the Church should speak boldly to the world in accents of authority, claiming in humble certainty to represent God's standards and purposes, and to have the secret of life in its keeping. If the Christian ethic is ever to be perceived by the world as a thing different from the convention of men, if in face of the agonised

chaos of human society, the Divine way is ever to be proclaimed, will it not be through a Church which has wholly abandoned all earthly popularity and worldly prestige and stands out simply as the body of those whom God has redeemed through His Son, and so indwelt by His Spirit as to qualify them to mediate His will to men ?

VII. *Vocation.*

It has always been one of the paradoxes of Catholicism that, while making little ethical demand upon the mass of its members, it yet numbers in its ranks men and women of an almost incredible devotion. The conception upon which the setting apart of the " religious " rests is that of vocation and it is a part of Catholic thought to which we may in conclusion pay some attention. Catholic practice has developed beyond the New Testament idea of gift and vocation, in the formal ecclesiastical setting apart of those who possess certain gifts of vocation, and more especially, in the organisation of such individuals into confraternities or orders, having a specialised life and service. The purpose of this specialised life is, partly, mutual

edification in spiritual things, and partly, corporate activity for the benefit of the Church as a whole. Beyond the ordinary distinction of the ordained minister from the laity, which is common to nearly all churches, we have in Catholic practice the distinction between those "called" and those not called to the "religious" life *par excellence*. This life is conceived of as a life of exclusive devotion to God, untrammelled by the cares of ordinary humanity, which is styled "secular." "Religious" is thus virtually equivalent to "ascetic"; the truly perfect life is made one and the same with the "angelic" life in virtue of that bodily self-denial symbolised by Poverty and Chastity and that spiritual self-denial symbolised by Obedience. The Protestant Reformers rejected the dualism which is essential to this view of the good life and went back to the New Testament doctrine of a salvation to be worked out in ordinary life, and through the fellowship of the Church. We are in line with this attitude when we emphasise the possibility of the doctor or the man of business, or the artisan treating his work as truly a vocation, and when we try to abolish the antithesis between "sacred" and "secular" and

claim all life as the sphere where God is truly to be served.

Nevertheless, we have much to learn from the Catholic idea of vocation, and of vocation to the ascetic life. The ascetic life is the life lived "in training." The Christian ascetic is a witness to an element which must be present in all healthy and serious Christian living. Moreover, there are special services which can only be rendered, and special tasks which can only be performed by men and women of dedicated spirit, who will undergo rigorous self-discipline, and self-limitation for the sake of greater service. The individual is most serviceable to the Kingdom of God when his powers are not diffused but concentrated and his natural aptitudes trained in view of a definite vocation. Some such vocations to-day are those of the evangelist at home or in the mission-field, the prophet of righteousness in social and economic relations, the scholar, the theologian of constructive grasp and insight. Such workers will often work best when they rest upon a group of companions and helpers, from which the individual goes forth with such training as may be needful, by whose fellowship he is

sustained and to which he can return for recuperation.

Such life needs to be subordinated to the life of the Church as a whole, lived in the atmosphere of the wider Church life and directed towards its enrichment. So conceived and maintained, it would be a means to the strengthening and deepening of all our Free Church life.

It would moreover restore to us, or strengthen among us, one spiritual grace which is too little found in Free Church life. The choicest types of Catholic piety seem to have gained the power of doing noble work in complete obscurity, with a disinterested and selfless zeal for the glory of God in a way that is not too frequently found among Free Churchmen. We think of several Catholics, (Anglican and Roman,) men and women of brilliant parts, who are to all appearance buried in obscure foreign mission work, little known even among missionaries, and labouring away at tasks which only God knows about, and with success which only He can gauge. Doubtless, there is no Church without its share of these finer spirits; it is they who keep the Church alive, and they are not to be found within the limits of any one Communion

alone. Yet we must register our conviction that this spirit is in need of revival among Free Churchmen to-day, and that it is to Catholics that we look to see the rarest example of this fine carelessness of what men think, this utter absorption in the work of God, however obscure the place where this work is to be done.

CHAPTER VI

MOVEMENTS TOWARD UNITY

The spirit of unity has already given rise to a great variety of movements for fellowship and associations for action among the Churches at home and abroad. The multiplication of sects during the last century went on simultaneously with an ever-increasing development of all kinds of united Christian groups and societies outside ecclesiastical organisations, yet composed mainly of their most keen and loyal members. This fact suggests that the spirit of revolt, exercised in breaking old Church ties and in forming new Church groups did not bring its subjects full content. Many have felt impelled to seek occasional contact along some line of religious interest with those of other bodies. Some have done so with a feeling of happy enfranchisement in escaping from the confinement of boundaries which were too narrow for

them, whilst others have done so with a half stifled sense of guilty laxity in allowing themselves to stray into the larger fellowship which included the members of Churches of which they disapproved.

Even a brief sketch of the recent societies and movements for which Christians have crossed their prescribed ecclesiastical borders would fill a volume of its own. In this chapter we shall make no attempt to write a history or even compile a dictionary of these movements. It will be enough to show by instances how deep is the desire and how various are the reasons which lead to Christian co-operation. We shall at the same time notice some of the pathways to unity which these movements bring into view and discuss some of the questions which are suggested by observing the lines along which the movement toward unity is proceeding to-day.

We may very usefully distinguish three main divisions of the subject, overlapping a little, but still distinct enough for the practical purposes of discussion and useful in the deductions which they suggest. First, the series of movements in which individual Christians have ex-

pressed their liberty to unite with other Christians for specific purposes. Next, the series of steps by which the organised denominations have been moving towards an organised corporate unity. Last, a series of movements giving local expression to the unity of the Church. In logic this development comes between the other two, but in order of time it comes last, and its importance also claims for it the place of emphasis at the close of the chapter.

I. *Individual Co-operation and Fellowship.*

The desire for common action is responsible for most of the earlier and many of the later manifestations of Christian unity. There are so many things which all Christians want to see done, and with regard to which their denominational differences do not divide them. For example, there is general agreement that the Bible should be translated by the ablest translators into all the languages of the world and widely diffused among all peoples in their own tongues. Hence the formation of the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804, and the support which it has ever since and ever increasingly been able to command from almost

all Christian people. So also it is a matter for general agreement that all children should be saved from gross ignorance of the Scriptures, shielded from the danger of homelessness and the wild life of the streets, and taught the elements of Christian faith and morals. Hence the formation of the Sunday School Union in 1803, the Ragged School Union in 1844, Dr. Barnardo's Homes in 1866, and many similar societies. The formation of the Y.M.C.A. in 1844 and the Y.W.C.A. in 1855, and their enormous growth in recent years represent the same sort of Christian agreement to meet an elementary need in an elementary way. Christian societies to promote international friendship and forward the idea of a League of Nations provide the most modern instance of this kind of joint action. Even in the work of Christian evangelism where differences of Christian thought cannot be so readily disregarded it has been found possible for Christians to unite, *e.g.*, to send missionaries to countries left unprovided for by the unrelated efforts of denominational missionary Societies. Thus we have the China Inland Mission springing up in 1865, and in later years various missions to Northern and

Central Africa, Central Asia and South America. Most of these societies are the genuine expressions of the common Christian consciousness, though a few may be due rather to some special spiritual affinity uniting the members of different communions. They have been prevailingly lay in their management and represent the layman's unwillingness to be held up by the niceties of verbal disagreement or the diversities of formal practice. The Laymen's Missionary Movement which, before the war arrested its activities, was growing rapidly in strength, represents the desire of laymen to put the work of foreign missions in a challenging way before the average man, on whom the appeals of denominational missionary societies make little impression.

A rather later stage in the development of united Christian fellowship is represented by the societies which exist not primarily for common action, but primarily to lay emphasis on some spiritual fact which they possess in common, and to enjoy a spiritual fellowship based upon that common possession. Thus for example we have the Evangelical Alliance founded in 1846 to promote common prayer

and common worship amongst those who are at one in their emphasis on the fundamental positions of all Protestant bodies. Again in 1875 we have the Keswick Movement, more forward-looking, taking its stand upon great and neglected truths concerning the state of spiritual inspiration into which Christian people should be able to enter. These and many similar movements illustrate a real unity of spirit transcending though not resolving denominational differences. As it has not been their function to harmonise their differences they have seemed sometimes to belittle points of which they have taken no account. But though they have not done anything to prepare the way intellectually for the coming unity of the Church, their emphasis on the underlying unity already existing and emphasised in the oft quoted words, "All one in Christ Jesus," has helped to produce the present unmistakeable demand of thoughtful and earnest Christian people for a new Church order.

When the purpose for which Christian people unite is so important and enthralling that it monopolises their religious energies, or when they find in their association with one another

all the religious expression that they need, they virtually form a new denomination. Thus the Salvation Army must now be regarded as a separate denomination. The Adult School Movement, and, to a lesser degree, the Brotherhood Movement also, are in danger of becoming denominations, whether they will or no. However much they may be related to the religious bodies from which they have arisen and upon whose help and hospitality they still depend, their tendency is to supply for the rank and file of their members all the religious fellowship that they want. Not that this is the deliberate policy of these movements; it is very often the exact opposite of what their leaders intend. None the less it is a real possibility that so far from providing a bond of union between people whose religious associations and traditions are diverse they may end in producing new bodies with associations and traditions exclusively their own, in some ways richer and in some ways poorer in spiritual possessions than those which they have left behind. All who are intimate with the present position of the Y.M.C.A. and the Y.W.C.A. among the Churches know that here too lies a question of great gravity. The

next few years may determine the momentous question whether these bodies will succeed in becoming a bond of union between the Churches, or whether they will drift into a position of unwilling but still real rivalry.

So far we have spoken of movements which unite their members for work or for fellowship upon the basis of a common element in their faith. This unity is not secured unless the common element is felt to be a central and vital element, and when that is the case it is easy to belittle, or at least to disregard, points of difference. By this disregard of differences they limit their usefulness as nurseries of catholic unity. In certain modern movements, on the contrary, the matters which divide the members from each other cease to have a merely negative relation to their fellowship, and become in themselves matters of interest. Here the common life gains not only by the expression of the faith which its members have in common, but also by the comparison and exploration of their points of difference. The Student Christian Movement, founded in this country in 1892, exemplifies this latter phase of the movement toward unity. Whereas in the older

movements you would hear it as a boast that no one ever knew what Church his fellow members belonged to, the boast of the newer movements is that their religious thought, and sentiment, and practice, are constantly being enriched by valued elements, definitely and consciously assimilated as a result of intimate spiritual intercourse with the members of Churches hitherto suspected or ignored. It is this difference of outlook—summed up by the substitution of the affix " inter " in place of the affix " un " before the word denominational—which has won for these movements the support of those who saw in the older types of movement imminent danger of blurring over important distinctions and sacrificing those considerable elements of the Christian tradition that have been as yet fully assimilated only by one or another section of the Church.

The Student Christian Movement is perhaps the most notable of all the inter-denominational educational forces making for unity. Its main chance has lain in the youth of its membership, whom it has influenced before the cramping effect of denominationalism has been powerfully exerted upon them. Women have taken

a growing share in the guidance and work of the movement, which has touched student life in all lands. Its platform is simply and fundamentally Christian, and therefore broad enough to afford room for all whom Christ has received. The movement is a spiritual and intellectual force, and combines evangelical fervour with modern scholarship. In certain Roman Catholic and Greek lands students of these faiths come into fellowship with those of the Reformed Churches. In the Far East the movement affords often a far more open way of approach to the non-Christian student than the organised Church or its mission agencies. Everywhere there is an emphasis on the search for truth as a whole, whether in the study of the Bible, or of Christian doctrine, or of the missionary duty of the Church, or of the application of Christianity to social life. And in each case the limitation of the method of teaching by books and public addresses is recognised and supplemented by the method of discussion in small and intimate groups.

But the need for this kind of inclusive fellowship of Christian thought is not confined to the members of colleges. The spirit of religious

enquiry is everywhere abroad and by the recognised principles of all study, religious enquiry is most fruitful if it is pursued by a great variety of students, working together, with access to all the best and most representative exponents of religious truth. Hence the growth of many organised fellowships and fraternals and the almost endless multiplication of special conferences for the united study of religious questions, in which the breadth of an interdenominational outlook multiplies the chance of finding the whole truth. Till recently such fellowship has been usually confined to ministers who have met in Fraternals;[1] occasionally it has included Church officers and Sunday School teachers, but it is now becoming much more common and varied. The recent formation of the Teachers' Christian Union has enabled teachers of all denominations and of all ranks in their profession to meet together for Christian fellowship in the search for Christian ideals of education, and their embodiment in daily practice. And now, in wider companies still,

[1] But these Fraternals did not as a rule bring Anglicans and Free Churchmen together until wartime experiences forced the pace.

and among the members of other professions and occupations, who wish to work out the Christian ideal of their callings, there is arising a Fellowship Movement for the exploration of the way to a Christian practice amid the perplexities of modern social life, and a reasoned view of matters in which the Christian doctrine seems to be challenged by modern thought. These fellowships are based upon the expressed belief that there is for earnest seekers in communion with Christ a way forward in all such questions.[1]

These more recent movements have reacted upon their predecessors so that there are now few Christian societies which have not added an element of study to their programme, and thus brought their members into closer mental contact, in ways calculated to shed new light upon all sources of division.

II. *Denominational Co-operation and Union.*

So much for the movements toward unity affecting individuals only and leaving official

[1] The constitutions of a few of these Fellowships are given in appendix B (p. 216). Their formation is advocated in a booklet entitled *Through Fellowship to Unity.* Student Christian Movement. 3d.

organisations so far untouched. The fact that Unity is not a visible achievement till it affects official organisations, gives importance to the official developments now to be described. Here we must begin by noticing that official action has many degrees of authority. Generally recognised denominational societies have sometimes no official status, so that their co-operation does not imply any official co-operation between the bodies which in a very real sense they represent. A striking instance of this is the case of the Foreign Missionary Societies of the Churches, many of which have no official standing with their denominational bodies [1] in spite of their fulfilling one of the very greatest of the functions of the Church. This fact is quoted not for the sole purpose of distinguishing between "fully official" and "merely representative" unity of action among the Churches, but also because of the light which it casts upon the curious intricacy of the problem of ecclesiastical unity. The task is not that of uniting a number of similar bodies fulfilling similar functions, each a complete unity in itself; it

[1] *E.g.* The London Missionary Society; The Church Missionary Society; The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.

is the task of uniting large groups of people whose unity is expressed through different organisations for different purposes. The official authority is sometimes not so much the organ through which the body acts as Christ's ministering representative upon earth as it is the specialised organ for perpetuating the Church's traditional form and order—its peculiar emphasis in doctrine and its peculiar practice in ritual and organisation. The difference is one which calls for more attention than it receives. The task of uniting the Church in this larger sense may be a more tractable one than the task of uniting the more purely official elements in the Churches. Formal union is bound to follow upon a realised unity of thought and action.

The co-operation of the Foreign Missionary Societies is the finest instance of co-operation of this not-completely-official kind established among the Protestant Churches of the world. Since the great Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910, a Continuation Committee has carried on a constant interchange of information and suggestion which has led to a great deal of united action. "Edinburgh 1910" will always

stand out as one of the mountain peaks of modern Christian history. It has not only inspired and guided united educational, medical, and evangelistic effort in many fields, but it has brought leaders of the Home Churches into closer contact and mutual knowledge and extends that fellowship to the sister Churches in the rest of the world. Indeed the very closest co-operation of East and West is essential to cope with the disastrous results of the denominational divisions of Western Christendom hitherto manifest in mission lands. Not unnaturally too, the question has been recurring, if co-operation be good over-seas in facing the non-Christian world and in building up a strong united Church in each land, is it not equally desirable at home ? Hence the further organisation of the Annual Conference of the Missionary Societies of Great Britain and Ireland which has added year by year since 1911 to the number and importance of its joint undertakings both at home and abroad. It now represents practically the whole of the missionary effort put forth by the Anglican and Free Churches. It is mainly an advisory body, and unites the thought of missionary leaders on the outstanding problems

which confront them all in common. Both in India and in China a large amount of co-operative work is carried on for which this Conference is jointly responsible with a similar American body. It is no mean test of the reality of their zeal for combined action that missionary societies with their heavy existing obligations to face, should vote thousands of pounds for work which benefits no one of them exclusively, but all of them together.

On a smaller scale a similar work of co-operation is growing up between the denominational societies and committees whose work it is to stimulate the Christian social service of Christian people and their Christian thinking upon social questions. As this work involves fewer questions of ancient dispute it includes a wider selection of Christian bodies. The following societies represent official co-operation between the Anglican, Free Church, and Roman Catholic bodies for strictly defined purposes :— The Conference of Christian Social Service Unions (1912), The United Temperance Council of the Churches (1915), and The Christian Social Crusade (1919). The many safeguards necessarily devised to make possible even such limited

and mainly consultative association without touching any peculiar ecclesiastical rights and privileges, show the precarious nature of these recent experiments. Yet they mark distinct progress in the direction of toleration and readiness to believe in the probable sincerity of those who, from an ecclesiastical standpoint, must be suspected or excluded. And they have generated a great deal of sympathy and understanding between those who might otherwise have remained for ever strangers to each other. The Annual Summer School of the Social Service Unions is indeed the source of a growing desire for Christian unity among all who attend it. Every year the School brings together from two to three hundred people for ten days of common meetings, common meals and fellowship. And though for the devotional periods the School divides into Roman, Anglican and Free Church, a common spirit of Christian devotion shows itself in many spoken contributions to discussion and in the moments of silent prayer with which each session opens.

When we reflect on the value and promise of this limited co-operation for moral education and social service, we are struck by certain ele-

ments of weakness and wastefulness. Generally speaking, the objects here in view are objects which do not express the whole meaning of Christianity. They are each concerned with some special application of Christianity to life. They are apt to appeal to different people and to win their support for different reasons. What is wanted is some massing of these separate movements in one. For though any given application of Christianity is not a matter of the most supreme importance, it is quite essential to the right expression of Christianity that Christian people should be carefully educated by their Churches in their social and political duties as a whole. If agreed so far, the Churches might easily co-operate to carry on this educational work on common lines. Some form of United Federation for this purpose would enable them to do together an essential piece of work that none seems ready to do alone. It would associate their members for a great deal of united thought and some united action touching questions of commanding urgency. The common association would surely help to kindle that sense of common interests and common feeling which must be at the basis of any stable common life.

To effect this it is necessary to combine the zeal and knowledge of the specialists in Christian service with the weight and authority of the official bodies. Official bodies are apt to be slow and ineffective in dealing with matters which they do not regard as primary to their being. But highly specialised unofficial bodies are apt to be ridden by sectional aims, to see things out of proportion, and so to fail to persuade the common Christian mind. Is it not possible that some counterpart of the Edinburgh Missionary Conference, officially carried through by the co-operation of both the official and the unofficial agencies of all the Churches, might give the work of Christian social thought and service its rightful place in the minds of Christian people ?

The Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America is one of the most concrete expressions of official unity in action. This federal unity consists in the genuine co-operation of denominations. It permits of differentiation, but secures corporate service in many fields of Church activity. The thirty Associating Bodies represent twenty million Protestant Church members. The constitution of the Federal Coun-

cil was adopted in 1905, and after ratification by the constituent bodies became the basis of a complete organisation three years later. Its distinctiveness consists in its being an officially and ecclesiastically organised body. It aims:

1. "To express the fellowship and Catholic Unity of the Christian Church.
2. "To bring the Christian bodies of America into united service for Christ and the world.
3. "To encourage devotional fellowship and mutual counsel concerning the spiritual life and religious activities.
4. "To secure a larger combined influence for the Churches of Christ in all matters affecting the moral and social condition of the people.
5. "To assist in the organisation of local branches."

The Federal Council has no authority to draw up a common creed or form of government or worship, or in any way to limit the full autonomy of the Christian bodies adhering to it. Its function is not legislation, but the expression of a common purpose to get the

work of the Churches done in co-operation. Denominational autonomy is safeguarded, and liberty is given not to participate in any given action. The Council consists of 400 members, a staff at Washington and various Conventions and Committees dealing with the chief problems and tasks of the Churches. It is probable that, while lessening the sectarian spirit, the movement has brought strength to denominational activities and has widened their reach.[1]

It is in many essential features an English form of this scheme that is being promoted by the Rev. J. H. Shakespeare, under the title of the "United Free Church of England." Till now the National Council of Evangelical Free Churches has been the only body to give any general expression to the common spirit which animates the Free Churches of England and Wales. It was founded in 1892 and involved the formation of local Councils and Federations all over the land. From these, and not from the denominations, it derives whatever authority it possesses. This constitutional arrangement

[1] For further information see the ample reports and papers issued by the Council from its offices in New York (215 Fourth Avenue).

was devised in order to circumvent the expected lethargy of the official bodies and it has certainly made for freedom of development in centres where the will for co-operation already existed. Here it has brought about a good deal of common Christian service, and a smaller amount of interdenominational fellowship, including united Communion Services. But it has not created any great common movement in the Free Churches nor led them generally into much deeper communion with one another. On the national scale it has rather lent itself to the expression of the more facile and superficial elements in Free Church life and has thereby created a quite false impression of the characteristic spirit of the Free Churches. The fact that it has been the only body which the Anglicans could regard as representative has given it a representative importance which is true neither in theory nor in fact. It falls rather between two stools. It is not a sufficiently representative body to take seriously in hand the whole work of uniting the Free Churches at every point and in every way where unity is possible. Neither, on the other hand, has it the strength and status which belong to a body of strictly limited aim. Both

its successes and its inevitable limitations have helped to lead the aspiration of the Free Churches to the better organisation which many of their leaders are now seeking.

To forward the new proposals a committee consisting of 80 members, appointed by a dozen Evangelical denominations, and by the National Free Church Council, met at Oxford in the Autumn of 1916, at Cambridge at Easter 1917, and in London in September 1917. A unanimous agreement has been reached in an important statement of Faith and Order[1] and in the recognition of the ministry of each body. The main lines of a constituted Council have been agreed upon. The most serious difficulty is in defining the objects and methods of co-operation, so as to make the federations of denominations real and extensive enough to be worth while, and yet not to encroach upon denominational liberty. The Report and Recommendations have been ratified by the constituent bodies at their Annual Assemblies, with the exception of the "Wesleyan Conference," whose objections do not appear to be subversive or insuperable. The new Council has held its first session this autumn. The dis-

[1] See Appendix C.

traction of the war and, later, of the inauguration of Peace, have hitherto prevented any widespread expression of opinion by the Churches. What may be truly said is that no satisfaction exists with the present position, outside small coteries whose office or temperament favour conservatism to the point of reaction.

We turn now to chronicle some steps towards complete official unity taken lately by divided Christian denominations. Several actual unions in the home-land have occurred within recent years. The Presbyterian union in Scotland, forming the United Free Church of Scotland (1900), constitutes the most notable instance of corporate fusion. The resistance of a small group of "Wee Frees," whose success in litigation in the highest Court was a strange triumph of verbal right, illustrates one of the ever-present dangers that must be prudently faced. The negotiations between the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church were proceeding with some favourable degree of rapidity when the war came, causing a necessary delay, but also leading to many immediate instances of joint general and local action. They have been resumed with sanguine hopes now that the

war has ceased. The fusion of the Methodist New Connexion, the Bible Christians and the United Methodist Free Churches took place in 1907, under the title of the United Methodist Church. The lean years to all religious bodies in the last decade, and the war, have been very adverse to such active and successful efforts as would rapidly have consolidated the Union. It is clear, however, that gains have already accrued from the coming together of bodies for which there no longer existed any serious reason for continued separation. The present representative Reunion Committee of the three main Methodist bodies appears to be making hopeful progress. The Churches of Christ and the Christian Association have just amalgamated (1917), a most natural step for two bodies whose outstanding plea was for Christian union on a New Testament basis. Hopeful negotiations are on foot between two quite small bodies—the Episcopal Free Church of England and the Reformed Church of England.

We must not, however, forget that the general problem of unity includes not only the healing of present divisions, but the guarding against fresh outbreaks of the sectarian or independent

spirit. While efforts toward union have gone on during more than a century, other fissiparous movements have come into being: and the story of two Bodies almost the poles apart gives material for studying the formation of new denominations. The Salvation Army has become to all intents and purposes a world denomination, with the strictest organisation and demanding the utmost loyalties. The Church of Christ Scientist, an American cult anglicised, has a membership largely drawn from existing Churches. We have already noticed some other tendencies in a similar direction.[1]

Looking abroad, the unity of Methodism in those parts of the Empire beyond our shores; the hesitating steps towards union of Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Wesleyans in Canada; the negotiations between Episcopal and Presbyterian Churches in Australia; all supply interesting material. More significant still is the excellent progress that has been made toward unity among the Churches on the Mission Field. Indeed some of our brightest hopes of unity have their birth in some of the new Gospel lands. "The Church of Christ in China"

[1] P. 134.

is one illustration; only a name and an ideal at present, but definitely chosen by the most representative Conference of Missionaries and native leaders ever held in that land. The union of several Churches in South India is an accomplished fact, and a big object lesson for the rest of India and elsewhere. Measures of practical co-operation in medical, educational, and other branches of work, are becoming so happily frequent as to call for little remark.

Thus the healing of divisions between bodies not divided by great gulfs of difference in their philosophy of religious thought and practice goes on apace. But we have come now to the day when bodies not within sight of official union, take official action to explore the grounds of their disagreement. This is in itself a form of mutual recognition far in advance of earlier attitudes. It implies a measure of ecclesiatical humility, and opens the door to understanding and readjustment. It is represented primarily by the movement for the promotion of a World Conference on Faith and Order, which sprang out of "Edinburgh 1910," with the purpose of doing constructive work for Christian union. The initiative for this came from North America,

and in that country a Preparation Committee has been at work securing from each body a formulation of faith and order, of things held in common by its own communion and the rest of Christendom, and of things held by its own communion as a special trust. In Great Britain a Joint Committee of the Church of England and the Free Churches has been at work under the presidency of the Bishop of Bath and Wells. This committee was appointed as the result of a joint conference in the Jerusalem Chamber, Westminster Abbey, between the Archbishops' Committee in connection with the World Conference on Faith and Order and the representatives of the Commissions of the English and Welsh Free Churches appointed by each of the Commissions to represent them at the joint conference. To this joint conference the joint sub-committee reports. Two interim reports have been issued and have been made public because it was believed that they were of general interest and would help to promote further discussion. These reports have gone far to establish unsuspected points of agreement between the Churches concerned,[1] and to

[1] The chief points of agreement are quoted in Appendix C.

point out the precise questions upon which further discussion should concentrate.

Most of the Reformed Churches of Europe and America have entered into the preparations for the Conference. To win the co-operation of the Roman and Greek Churches, an official Commission, appointed by the Executive committee, has this spring visited Rome and the East. The Holy Synods of Constantinople, Athens, and Belgrade have agreed on behalf of their respective Churches to take part in the Conference. Prominent men in the Armenian, Russian, Rumanian, and Bulgarian Orthodox Churches are in sympathy with the movement, and when conditions in these countries become more settled it is believed that the Churches will take part officially in the movement. On the other hand, the Pope, after having been approached by the official deputation, has decided not to enter into any discussion of the subject. The attitude of the Church of Rome is that she is ready to receive back into her communion individuals, or groups of persons, which groups may comprise a whole Church, who are ready to make their submission.

III. *Congregational and Local Action.*

When one looks through even the above partial list of interdenominational Societies inviting membership, and general mission agencies appealing for funds, one might imagine that the field of practical Christian unity was fairly well covered for the time being and until the day of official union dawns. It would be easy to exhaust any man's time and strength and money in responding to the calls of Christian agencies outside denominational control. But a close survey of almost any town or large parish will undeceive most students. With rare exceptions a wasteful disorder of religious activities will be apparent, sometimes a scandalous competition and rivalry, in a district which suffers, whilst it condemns, this travesty of religious liberty. Many a village shows the same thing on a smaller but more comprehensible scale. No one who first estimated the forces of evil and the task of the Body of Christ manifested to destroy them, could possibly have drawn up deliberately any such plan of campaign and disposal of the Church's forces as the present time exhibits. It seems as if

there were some subtle element in the atmosphere preventing the coming together even of the bodies that are most similar. Some insulating medium exists; sometimes personal or class prejudice, or intellectual bias; more often a widely diffused denominational spirit, fortified by the daily toils of an official class, the zeal of the Press organ, and even the profit-making aims of a publication department. Many a Christian congregation says like Paul "I cannot do the thing I would." It is bound by rules and standing orders, and supervised and checked in denominational interests. Ministers have so much to do to keep up their connection and that of their Church with their Headquarters, that they have to decline or ignore many opportunities for united service with other Churches, the fruit of which would not appear in denominational statistics or financial statements, though it might tell in the creation of a better social order or a more widely diffused Christian spirit.

It is one of the prices that must at present be paid for our divisions that the unity and cohesion of each denomination can only be secured by an exaltation of the loyalties which scattered congregations owe to their denomi-

national unions in contrast with the local loyalties which neighbouring Christian congregations of different denominations owe to one another. From the point of view of Christian unity, the erection of Church Houses, the collection of Endowment Funds and the establishment of Sustentation Schemes have their dangers, or at least their disadvantages. One readily admits some of the all-round gains that have been won thereby. The ministry has been improved, weak Churches have been strengthened, wilful Churches have been restrained, and a measure of uniform compactness has been given to each group. Yet this very compactness is one of the chief obstacles to genuine local unity. A recent American writer makes out a strong case for a "denominational disarmament," that would turn the self-centred sectarianism of Christendom into self-effacing service for the coming of the one Kingdom of our common Lord. Among the signs of the sincerity of the loudly professed desire for unity, there should be discerned the slackening of the denominational bridle, the taking away of bearing reins, to give a free chance for the Spirit of God to guide the local

developments of a more humanly free and more divinely dependent Church.

Yet, within the limits of the strictest ecclesiastical discipline, room is now being found increasingly for many significant local expressions of the unity which Christian people undoubtedly possess. The more this local unity is expressed, the greater will grow the volume of the demand for the removal of denominational restrictions felt in practice to be unnecessary and burdensome. Such demands, growing out of experiments in unity made on all hands are likely to be both more powerful and more wise than the demands made on theoretic grounds by Church reformers. Or at the least the former are required to check and supplement the latter. They will represent the inspired common spirit of the Christian people awakening in practice to the meaning of their common membership in the Body of Christ. What is most to be desired is an intercongregational development which will bring the general body of earnest Christian people in each locality into frequent Christian association with one another both for thought and service—not a merely esoteric development involving only the few who are

already predisposed to fraternise with each other. For this it is desirable that every united movement on a national scale (whether voluntary or official) should have its counterpart in the local life.

Suppose then a local Christian community seeking to express to the full its local unity; to what models of united action can it turn for suggestion? To begin with, there has been found possible a great deal of united action for the education of the Christian community in the facts and possibilities of the missionary situation. United Missionary Conventions, Missionary Exhibitions, Missionary Training Schools for Study Circle Leaders and Sunday School Teachers, Children's Missionary Demonstrations and the like, afford plentiful instances of successful co-operation, proving that here is a piece of work in which Christians are enthusiastically at one. There has also been of late years a growing movement to reproduce locally the co-operation achieved on a national scale, as we have seen, between the Churches having Social Service Unions or Committees. As this work has been mainly of a preparatory character in most places and so not widely known, it may be

well to describe in detail what has been achieved, in a single centre. At Evesham a local Christian Social Service Council was appointed some few years ago on which all the Churches were officially represented; the Unitarian minister making the first move in the matter. Expert committees were appointed to deal with different sections of the work—Housing, Education, Allotments, Public Amusements. Almost immediately a Maternity Centre was established in connection with the local Authority, and it is not too much to say that Evesham has now a representative Christian body able to bring the Christian forces of the town to bear upon its social needs.

There is gain in thus making a single body chargeable with a wide range of Christian social education locally. It divides interest and multiplies labour to have innumerable different societies endeavouring to educate opinion upon questions of Christian conduct—this one dealing with social service, that with temperance, a third with housing schemes, a fourth with social purity, a fifth with the ethics of socialism, and yet another with the duty of Christian nations in their international dealings. One

strong Christian Educational Council depending upon experts in each field of study, is far better than a multitude of small competing societies. But this is not a task to be taken lightly. The full need can hardly be met till each city or county area has something like a Christian University of its own, well staffed, with courses of lectures and classes upon every variety of problem, practical or theoretical, social or political. No such Christian college in this country can be quoted as a model, but the work of such Settlements as Beechcroft at Birkenhead and Lemington on the Tyne give some index of the work that can be done if there is a will to do it. We read of something of the sort in an American city which has constituted a Council of Religious Education, appointed a superintendent, established a training school for religious leaders with a faculty of twelve specialists and a roll of nearly three hundred students, organised public lectures and Bible schools, and set itself to make a complete survey of the industrial, social and educational life of the community in order to be in a position "to create a community conscience" on matters of local religious interest, both by means of

united conferences and conventions and by co-ordinated educational campaigns among the co-operating congregations.

In all these forms of co-operation it is greatly to be desired that *all* who can unite in them should be persuaded to do so. It is one of the serious defects of the steps toward unity taken by the Free Churches during the last three decades that they invited the co-operation of Free Churches only, for purposes which could not be secured without a more complete co-operation of Christian bodies. For public worship it is manifestly difficult for widely divided Christian bodies to co-operate. But in discussing the Christian attitude to social facts and duties old ecclesiastical controversies and disagreements constitute no impassable barrier, while on the contrary the differences of religious training and the varieties of approach to practical questions which these differences imply make discussion all the more stimulating, and ultimate agreements all the more comprehensive and valuable. Much is possible also in united movements of an educational kind even where questions of faith and worship are involved. In Liverpool, for example, it has been possible for

Free Church people and Anglicans to unite in providing training in biblical and doctrinal subjects for Sunday School teachers and other students of religious thought, and this training has included opportunities for united prayer and worship, as well as for the sharing of lectures and discussions. Along more general lines, Huddersfield affords an instance of an Anglican, a Presbyterian, a Congregational, a Baptist, and a United Methodist Church arranging a three months' course of united week-night services for the study of the Sermon on the Mount—a better means of interchanging Christian thought and experience than any mere exchange of pulpits could supply. From time to time history presents unique opportunities for expressing the unity of the Christians of a place. When it is seized, both religious and local feeling greatly gain. Thus for example, during the strain of war there came certain dramatic opportunities for united prayer, and these opportunities were greatly used. There are many instances in which all the Churches were able to combine—not excluding the Roman Catholic. The declaration of peace has also been made the occasion for the solemn and united rededica-

tion of the life of many towns and cities to God.

The plan of placing all these local expressions of unity under the direction of some single representative body greatly strengthens the sense of Christian solidarity in any neighbourhood. It then becomes important that the united activities are varied and weighty enough to do justice to the vast interests which Christians have in the common service of the world. The Council of Christian Congregations formed recently in Manchester, Bolton, Derby, Harrogate, and other places, have given form to this idea, and shown that it is not necessary that such Councils should confine their attentions to social and moral questions upon which all Christians, and indeed all people of good will, can easily unite. They may also help to foster more religious expressions of unity, with due regard to the liberties of the constituent congregations.[1]

[1] "The visible unity of the Body of Christ is not adequately expressed in the co-operation of the Christian Churches for moral influence and social service, though such co-operation might with great advantage be carried much further than it is at present; it could only be fully realised through community of worship, faith and order, including common participation in the Lord's Supper. This would be quite compatible with a

Thus the object of the Harrogate and Knaresborough Council of Christian Congregations is "to bring nearer the realisation of the Kingdom of God by witnessing to, and upholding in all its fulness, the Christian ideal of life, both personal and social, especially within its own district." It is the duty of its executive "to inform the responsible leaders of the congregations of movements for religious, moral, and social welfare, as well as dangers which seem to threaten the Christian welfare of the community" and "to summon meetings for prayer, Conference or witness for the advancement of the Kingdom of God." We are informed that the Council has in the first twelve months of its existence held public meetings on Temperance and the League of Nations; each public meeting followed by a council meeting to take such action as the meeting seemed to call for. It has immediately taken its place as the corporate representative of local religious life in questions of public interest, such as the administration of the War Memorial fund and the public celebration of Peace. Moreover it has supplied the local Edu-

rich diversity in life and worship." *Faith and Order Joint Sub-Committee Second Interim Report.*

cation Authority with a syllabus of religious instruction for use in the Council Schools. Anglicans and Free Churchmen are fairly evenly represented on the Council and the Roman Catholics have participated in its more public work. In Bolton similar work has been carried on, and has been marked by co-operation with the local Municipal, Trade and Labour associations. To secure effectiveness the members of the Council have divided themselves into five sub-committees for the consideration of the following subjects: (1) "Religious Service and Fellowship," (2) "Housing and Public Health," (3) "Social and Industrial Questions," (4) "Religious and Secular Education," (5) "Public Morals." The work of these Committees is to study the various questions, acquire information as a basis for action, and to secure the operation of Christian ideals in these matters. Many places have during the past four years been driven to set up representative bodies for fulfilling the necessary war time services for which no provision existed in the old machinery of Church and State. It is to be hoped that these may in many cases develop into Councils of Christian Congregations in the days of peace.

Before passing from this picture of the work which the Councils of Christian congregations can do, let us give rein to our imagination for a moment. Let us suppose in each great centre of population a body of representative Christian people who by their public services have won the confidence of their district, and, by their disinterested motive and their careful zeal for the common good, have brought about from time to time many obvious transformations of the civic and industrial life of their neighbourhood. Would they not have at once realised and demonstrated their unity and won the right to arrange for great occasions of united worship when the public mind was stirred? And within the shadow of such an edifice of public action many more private and intimate expressions of interdenominational fellowship might be fostered, quite as valuable for the domestic life of the Church as its public activity:—united study of every phase of Christian truth and duty; fraternals not only for ministers, but for teachers, employers, domestic workers, social servants; group conferences for classes of people having a special problem to solve or a special part to play in the upbuilding of the Kingdom of God.

Acts of united communion under special safeguards might be the seal and symbol of the very intimate spiritual fellowship which would thus be shared by the few whom God would thus cause to be the pioneers of a new time.[1]

Thus there might be placed within the reach of every Christian man and woman an opportunity of sharing spiritual fellowship with other Christian people, to the utmost limit compatible with their individual readiness for such intercommunion, and with the ecclesiastical disciplines which they severally obey. The Church would thus learn by practice and under the free guidance of the Spirit what should be the ultimate nature of the central union of all Churches in the one visible Body of Christ. Before ever the necessary formal adjustment were finally made, Christian people would in many a neighbourhood be united in one association to serve and worship God.

[1] We rejoice to have read in a book published whilst this book was going through the press a strong, clear plea for intercommunion between Anglicans and Free churchmen upon special occasions and with proper safeguards. The book referred to is *Towards Reunion*, and the writers are recognised leaders of both Anglican and Free Churches. The plea for intercommunion is urged by Canon E. A. Burroughs of Peterborough.

CHAPTER VII

THE WAY TOWARDS UNION

At the close of our theoretic discussions and the setting forth of our aspirations for an increase of Christian fellowship, we must turn to consider what can now be done to heal the organised disunion of the Church. We have considered the New Testament ideal of the One Church; we have seen that upon its realisation depend our understanding of Christ, the development of Christian character, the efficiency of our witness to the world; and we have admitted that any unity worthy of the name must be both inward and outward. Now if complete inward unity really existed, that would be manifested outwardly; for despite the constant assertions that we are united on central matters, and the now almost vehement desire to find some degree of Church union, we are convinced that our divisions go down

deeper than is generally recognised, and that even inner unity has still to be gained. If this is lost sight of, the discussions which are everywhere now taking place will once again prove fruitless, while any attempts to settle our differences upon the idea that they are only superficial will end in further disappointment. We do not for a moment under-estimate the sincerity of the earnest desire which impels the modern movement towards Church Union; we rejoice in it, and believe it is due to the working of the Holy Spirit who is seeking to bring order out of the chaos we have made of His Church. But it is because we long so intensely for these desires to reach realisation that we are anxious that the difficulties should be clearly recognised; and, if these difficulties are to be surmounted, then we must penetrate to the principles on which they rest, and seek reconciliation in some principle deeper still.

I. The Depth of our Divisions Recognised.

The actual visible barriers which separate Churches may be described as differences of creed, ritual and government. Churches hold by different creeds and confessions, and these

would have to be reconciled. But this would require far more than the invention of some theological formula which would comprehend them all, or the falling back on some historic creed in order to secure a minimum of agreement. For there are many Churches which make it something approaching a principle to have no creed whatever, since they regard the adoption of a creed as a complete misunderstanding of the nature of faith, and a hindrance to the free exploration and expression of Christian truth. Again, if some of these Churches *could* be brought to adopt a confession of faith, it would almost certainly not take the form of any of the historic creeds: what would be preferred would be a profession of faith which was devotional and practical. All this reveals that there is a deep-going difference of opinion as to the intellectual element implicit in faith and the metaphysical and historical basis which religion demands; in short, divisions due to credal difficulties go down to different ideas about the nature of faith. Again, take the differences of ritual. It would perhaps not be impossible to secure a minimum agreement on rites and ceremonies between Churches which

employ outward forms of worship; though even here devotional attachment to certain forms, and a conservative clinging to their historically developed rites would probably prove extraordinarily intransigeant. But there still has to be considered the cleavage between those Churches which employ and defend ritual on principle, and those Churches which reject it equally on principle; the opposing principles in each case resting upon different conceptions of what worship is, different ideas of how inner experience ought to be expressed, and finally upon different philosophies of the relation between spirit and matter. The problem of Church government looks quite capable of a readjustment which would comprehend all the historic polities in one reconciling system by a process of reasonable compromise, involving only the delimitation of authority on the one hand and of individual liberty on the other. But it would soon be discovered that questions of order concealed beneath them the question of "Orders," which really means something quite different from mere order, and raises the more fundamental question as to whether the Church derives its existence from an original endow-

ment of life, from which essential power must continue to be derived through a certain prescribed channel, or from individual centres of life springing up spontaneously and independently, which tend to unite by natural attraction; and this means that there are grave differences of opinion as to the very constitution of the Christian Church. It is, we believe, just because these fundamental issues are never realised that discussions upon what are taken to be mere superficial differences break up in despair, and time after time promising movements fail to achieve any real progress.

II. The Possibilities of Reconciliation Affirmed.

Yet while we demand that the deep-lying causes of divergence be first recognised, we do so because we believe that there is a possibility of reconciling them. There is a cleavage which goes right down to bed-rock principles, but we believe that these principles are not so antagonistic as are thought, that they are complementary rather than contradictory, and, therefore, that if reconciliation could be reached here, it would be found far easier to reconcile the more superficial differences to which they

have given rise. It is therefore to the fundamental problems that we ask our scholars and thinkers to give their attention; and we believe the time is ripe for a deeper understanding. In secular philosophy, materialistic and spiritualistic theories have both run out into impossible extremes, and the world of thought seems now ready to recognise that spirit and matter are both real, that matter depends upon spirit, and that spirit can be mediated through matter. In the realm of scholarship the onesidedness and contradictoriness of the various portraits of Christ as they have been portrayed by modern thought are at last being felt, and we are now ready to recognise that Christ was much more inclusive and catholic than rival interpretations have realised. Again, the history of the Church shows that, while the spirit of God continually overflows the traditional channels and seems often compelled to seek an instrument altogether outside the Church, there are also times when the traditional channel is the sole link with the sources of life, and the Church remains the only effective witness of faith. What all this leads us to strive for is the recognition of both sides of reality, spirit and

matter; the many sidedness of Christ; the normal and the abnormal activities of the Spirit; and to shape our Church policy and principles in accordance with that recognition.

When once an inclusive and reconciling principle has been found, we can go on to find a basis for re-adjustment by determining what is to be reckoned primary and what is to be reckoned secondary. This might not be able to be determined without considerable discussion, for it is often a debatable issue whether a thing is primary or secondary; but the way towards reconciliation would be considerably advanced if we could agree that some things *are* primary and some things *are only* secondary. For instance, Catholics ought to admit that, considering the New Testament, the fundamental principles of the Christian religion, the primacy of spirit over matter, and the unlimited operation of the Spirit of God, certain matters of historical controversy were not primary but secondary. But it would also have to be admitted by Free Churchmen that what was decided to be secondary, did not mean that it could be entirely ignored, but that it must have the very next place in consideration

and importance. Secondary means next to the primary, not simply nowhere at all. Again, much progress towards mutual adjustment could be made, if it was definitely recognised that due place must be found in the Church for both the regular and the abnormal. Just as in the world of nature God works normally through defined succession and unvarying method, and yet is never so bound by these that, when there is need, He cannot employ the phenomena which we are bound to classify as miraculous; so in the Church we should expect to find the Spirit normally working through regular means, and yet also on occasion breaking forth in exceptional and unexpected ways. If only we could secure that the regular ministry, the regulated order of worship, should be granted its rightful place, and yet never to the exclusion of room for some special manifestation of the Spirit in exceptional ministries and spontaneous utterance, while at the same time those who felt specially called recognised the necessity and place for the normal channels, and the danger of attempting to exalt the phenomenal as the standard and rule, we should surely have gone far to bring the claims for the

impossible extremes of all rule, or no rule, to a point where reconciliation might take place.

In addition to differences due to fundamental principles, there are others which are in the main accidental. In our English society, a further division between Episcopal and non-episcopal Churches has been introduced by the fact that the Episcopal Church is established while the Free Churches are not. This again is weighted by a natural, but not inevitable result, and one which can exhibit many examples to the contrary, that the cleavage of the Establishment carries with it social distinctions, which, in small communities, can operate in the direction not only of exclusiveness but even of persecution. That question we may hope to see progressively settled, because it is certain that Establishment cannot much longer continue on its present lines, and some new conception of the relation between Church and Nation might be discovered which would unite Anglicans and Nonconformists if only the present conditions were changed. But it ought also to be recognised that among the Free Churches themselves there are quite visible

differences of general social level corresponding to the different denominations, which therefore generate a different ethos or atmosphere corresponding to temperamental and cultural differences. This must not be dismissed as negligible, for persons trained in one type of atmosphere often find it difficult to breathe in another. In addition to this there are the historic loyalties and inevitable conservatisms of all religious temperaments, which dread change and dislike innovation. When one meets these things at close quarters, and contemplates the effort and patience that will be demanded before they can be overcome, reinforcing as they do the fundamental differences which have so far defeated all efforts at solution, one is inclined to doubt whether anything will be of any avail save some great calamity which would shock all the Churches together in a brotherhood of suffering or persecution, or whether we may not have to wait until some new Pentecost of religious revival draws us all back from the circumference to the centre, and consumes our barriers in a new flame of love for Christ and for one another.

III. The Present Upward Trend.

But we can rejoice in much that is already taking place which may help to fuse the Churches into one. The war has been a shock, the extent of which we have yet to measure, and it has done not a little to quicken the demand for religious unity; while in many of the expressions of desire for Church union we are bound to recognise a real spiritual concern which we can only trace to one source. We recognise and welcome every possibility of declaring that we all stand together in adherence to the absoluteness of Christ as Lord and Saviour, and the ascription to Him of Supreme Headship over His Church. We note the eirenical results of modern scholarship, which slowly but inevitably bring about a more impartial judgment upon the original character of Christianity, the interpretation of Scripture, the points at issue in theological controversies, and the underlying causes of historical schisms and separations; for while differences of interpretation and judgment remain, scholarship no longer binds itself only to primitive practice and logical conclusions, but takes account of the

significance of historical evolution and the developing needs of human nature. We welcome the growth of toleration, which is one of the most conspicuous marks of our age. At its lowest level, toleration may be perhaps indistinguishable from mere laziness and the fading of conviction, and sometimes it is no more than the prudential recognition that to repress or persecute is the one way to perpetuate that which it is sought to destroy; but at its highest it is an indispensable condition for arriving at the truth, and is indisputably according to the mind of Christ. And higher than toleration is the developing sympathy which not only allows others to follow practices and beliefs which one would never follow oneself, but sees that they are necessary to meet needs and satisfy instincts which are real and legitimate. There is even a welcome willingness to correct one's own convictions by reference to the convictions of others, and to adopt, along lines of one's own approach and with such alterations as may be necessary, the valid elements in the faith and practice of others.

While, therefore, we may have to wait for some supreme baptism of love and loyalty

which will fuse the Church into one, we believe we ought to be not only waiting continually upon God from whom alone that gift can come, but also laying down lines of connection and planning avenues of contact in believing expectation of some such visitation for which we shall need to be prepared.

It seems therefore open to us to suggest certain steps by which the practical problem ought to be approached and the future be prepared for. What has to be recognised is that Unity will not be gained merely by a series of consecutive single stages so much as by a series of approaches along many different lines, which will make it possible for the whole Church to be fused together when some great awakening comes.

IV. A Plea for Denominational Recognition of the One Church.

To begin with, it should be regarded as incumbent upon all denominations whatsoever to show good reason why they remain separated from any other Church or Churches; and the only reason that will be reckoned sufficient at this hour is that they are diligently preparing

themselves to make some great contribution to the Catholic Church of the future. They will not only have to show perfectly clearly that they really possess the thing they believe they are called to witness to, and that they possess this as no other Church does, but they will have to consider why other Churches seem to be so complacent in not possessing it, and how they propose to recommend it for their adoption when the great Peace Conference of the Churches is called. Especially must each denomination see to it, in all its practices and pronouncements, and particularly in the instruction given to the young and to candidates for membership, that loyalty to the Church as a whole is the first duty acknowledged and commanded. Every denomination must make it clear that baptism, however administered, is not the sign of admission to a sect, but is baptism into the One Body; and that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is the sacrament of Unity, and apart from unity is without full meaning and value. Let every Church member be taught that he is related to the One Church, not because his denomination is a branch of the True Vine, or a member of the

Sacred Body—a notion that we have seen to be unscriptural—but because he himself is immediately united in Christ to the whole Body of His Church, and is related to the denomination only as a first step to the outward expression of his membership with all the rest.

Denominational loyalty can only be enjoined as it subserves that supreme loyalty. This can be presented in such a way that it is impossible to pervert it into a plea for the evasion of denominational loyalty on the ground that one belongs to all the Churches; which is simply not true. We are not pleading for undenominationalism; that is now everywhere condemned; but we are pleading that from the nature of the Church as conceived by Christ, as well as from the inevitable tendencies of our age, even denominational officials must now realise that denominational loyalty, however excusable in the present distress, can now be urged only in so far as it can be shown that it serves the Church as a whole, and is not inconsistent with loyalty to the Church as a whole. We therefore go on to urge that it is the duty of every Church to encourage its membership, and especially its young people, not only to

be in possession of clear reasons for belonging to that particular denomination, but also to know the faith, practices and apologetic of other Churches. If the Catholic Truth Society can undertake a reasonably impartial examination of this kind, no one else ought to fear to do so. It must be a fair study, taking the very best statement of the other case that can be found, the defects also being studied, and the remedies that one's own system is supposed to provide being carefully examined. No denomination has any right to invite members to join it without telling them something of what other denominations stand for.

V. A Plea for Co-operation between Churches.

The next step is to extend the co-operation between different Churches.[1] This we have seen to be generally possible on such subjects as Sunday Observance, Temperance, Sexual Purity, Marriage and Social Reform. More occasionally it has been found possible to co-operate in Biblical Exposition and in certain selected aspects of Apologetics. But, after all, these are only circumferential concerns, and our

[1] See Chapter vi. for instances of what is possible.

agreement upon such subjects is only fortuitous. People everywhere now want to discuss the differences and distinctions of the various Churches, to compare experiences, and learn from one another; and the desire for religious fellowship with those of other denominations has fortunately become one of the most promising features of our times. It is where gatherings can be arranged in an atmosphere of friendship and common desire to learn from one another that hostilities are broken down, ancient prejudices abandoned, misunderstandings remedied, and the old style of polemics once so common on platform and pulpit made impossible. We look to the growth of such fellowship gatherings, especially those which could be established locally, to provide the growth of opinion and demand for action which are essential if central and official denominational action is to be taken with any success; not that we are of those who deprecate and despair of official and denominational action; but only that individual and group activity must go on alongside, and often in advance of it. We therefore lay the utmost stress upon the importance of developing local Christian fellowship, in thought and action, upon every possible line.

We have seen that it has been found possible to establish in certain large centres Church Councils to which representative delegates are sent from Churches of all denominations. At present these Councils are inclined to delimit their activities strictly to the consideration of social and moral questions, though happily it is not always so; but we believe that however cautiously they begin, they must inevitably generate the desire for religious fellowship; and although hasty action along this line would probably only defeat its own ends, it will demand that some efforts to reach religious agreement shall be undertaken by those who have the authority to do so. We believe that it would be well to consider whether in every part of the country the time has not now come for the Free Church Council to be superseded or, at least supplemented, by the Church Council, even if for some time to come that Church Council has to refrain from definitely religious discussion and fellowship. We would further recommend that the local action which has already been taken with such promise in a few centres should be followed up by a National Church Council in which the leaders of the

Churches should gather together with considerable frequency and continuity to watch the affairs of the Kingdom of God. There might arise in time a sort of Spiritual Parliament, without legislative authority of course, but with power to make recommendations back to denominations. With such a constitution it would probably be found that discussion of subjects other than the purely social and moral would be possible; the result of which would be a demand that the denominations should inaugurate constitutional action to consider the possibilities of closer religious relationship.

The plea we urge is that free local fellowship between those of different denominations should be established wherever possible, that official Councils both local and national should be formed for joint action on social and moral questions, and for at least a measure of co-operation in educating the members of all the Churches to an appreciation of the positive principles and the religious values for which each Church stands. Free fellowship between the members of different denominations would provide a means but not the only means of doing this; the use of literature and the inter-

change of speakers would also help. We propose these things because we believe that they are indispensable to any corporate movement towards Union, and that they will inevitably quicken the desire for the One Church. We are not forgetting the carefully planned and tremendously important World Congress of Faith and Order already arranged to take place in America in the near future; but we are certain that nothing can be carried through on a world basis which is not backed up by local and national action and inspired by actual discovery of the power of united religious fellowship.

VI. A Plea for further Federation and Union.

We go on to suggest still other lines of approach. We believe that wherever Churches are sufficiently alike in doctrine, tradition and polity they should be formally united. Where complete union is impossible it may be still possible for certain sections of the Churches' work to be fused at once, *e.g.*, their colleges for the training of the ministry, their foreign missionary societies, their social service unions, their publishing activities, their Sunday School and Young People's departments. We hope, indeed, that

the newly appointed Council of the Free Churches may prove to be the means of bringing about immediately some such fusion of these activities, as a step on the way to their complete union. But where it is the case, as it is now, that the members and even the ministers of many of the Free Churches can easily pass from membership of one denomination to membership of another without feeling that they are calling any great principle in question, there must be room for a good deal more union of Churches. It might reasonably be questioned whether the smaller unions might not prevent or postpone the still larger union which we are seeking. Would not the bringing together, say, of all the Methodist or the Presbyterian Churches only tend to harden and isolate still further the different types; while if we could get, say, a union of all the Protestant Churches on the one side and all the Catholic Churches on the other, would not that only stiffen opposition and dig deeper the fundamental differences? The answer seems to be found in the fact actually discovered, that union begets the desire for union. No sooner are Churches united than they begin to look round for still further possibilities of union. And it is

reported that if Rome were confronted with a united Protestant Church, she would be much more moved to consider union upon a comprehensive basis than when faced with the present chaos of Churches ; against which her own order seems a sufficient argument for the need of rigidity and centralisation being maintained unimpaired. One danger however has to be borne in mind, and this whether we are planning small unions or considering the union of the whole Church ; great care must be taken to see that we do not simply multiply our present difficulties in increasing the size of a corporation. We are all too well aware of the great difficulty of getting any movement under weigh in any highly constituted organisation, and this is bound to be intensified the larger the institution becomes. The officials of large organisations tend to become either completely unrepresentative, whereupon energy gets wasted in party politics and in endeavours to turn out the executive : or leaders to whom considerable powers of action are given become colorless reflections of the different parties they must consider and are therefore incapacitated from taking any action whatsoever. We must take

warning from the fact that the Papacy, as it has been developed, is really a sheer necessity if we are to have a vast organisation which must be able to take swift action and take it altogether.

Somehow the Church has to solve the question that is also plaguing the political world: how to combine central authority with local freedom, and representation with true leadership. That leads us to make the daring suggestion that the whole Church needs to embrace in one comprehensive system the different types of Church Government which have been historically developed: Papacy, Episcopacy, Presbyterianism, and Congregationalism. This might be found to be other than a wild dream if it was recognised that here was really a place for honourable compromise, which could be secured by the delimitation of authority, by agreement as to what things ought to be bound and what ought to be left free, and especially by discovering the real nature of Christian authority to consist in the persuasion of love, and to rest upon the enthusiasm of loyalty, instead of borrowing the notions of coercion and the oath of absolute obedience upon which the secular State and military discipline rely. Indeed this may prove to be

something much better than compromise—a real experiment in combining complementary principles hitherto supposed to be contradictory. Episcopacy, for instance, which the Free Churches are sometimes asked to swallow as a comparatively harmless concession to Catholic prejudice, or a prudent insurance against possible but unproved defects in their ministry, might come to be accepted with genuine enthusiasm if it were rightly presented as signifying the mystical Communion with the Church of the past, which is the Church now triumphant in heaven; as conveying recognition by the whole Church now militant on earth; as a valuable means of maintaining personal fellowship between the local and central officers of the Church.[1] . . . This, however, would require an Episcopate not only in the historic succession and in unbroken communion, but also democratically elected and truly representative.

[1] It is interesting to note that both the Baptist and Congregational Churches have recently adopted a system of supervision of their churches, grouping them in large areas, which is rightly described as episcopal, though other terms are used for the new office that has been created. The necessities of the case have disclosed the wisdom of this method of ordering the affairs of the Church. Already, however, the difficulty is felt of electing the new "Moderators" on the principles of the spiritual demo-

VII. A Plea for Denominational Comprehension.

Alongside all movements towards union the whole process would be enormously speeded up, and properly prepared for, if each denomination first set itself towards becoming really comprehensive. The idea that one denomination is solely and wholly the Church is now almost entirely confined to the Church of Rome: others have to fall back upon the plea that the various denominations stand for a certain aspect of truth or a particular form of religious experience. We have, we hope, finally disposed of this plea by showing that it is neither an actual fact nor an adequate ideal for any Church. In view of the fact that the truth of Christianity is whole and indivisible, because it centres in Christ, who is the truth about God and man, about the universe and history, this plea of denominational witness can only be characterised as an attempt to sectarianise the truth and dismember Christ. Therefore no denomination can be sanctioned merely to

cracy, and the fear is not unfounded that the controlling committee, which with the local committees will co-ordinate and recommend the appointments, will have an influence which must become increasingly "oligarchic."

stand for some particular truth, except temporarily, as it may still be necessary, in order to preserve the balance of truth which has been distorted by some other denomination or neglected by all others. It therefore becomes the duty of every denomination to look not only upon its own things, but upon the things of others: to consider the truths which other denominations hold and to appropriate them itself.

We have already pointed out the comprehensive tendency of modern theology and hinted that there is the possibility of a comprehension of differing forms of government; we would go on to suggest that there is the necessity for comprehending different forms of worship. It is in the provision of different types of worship that denominationalists often defend themselves, and sometimes point to the post-reformation history of the Church as a most perfect dispensation of Providence for meeting the varied temperaments and idiosyncracies of the modern world. But this raises the important question, first, whether we ought to herd ourselves together according to temperament, and, second, whether some of us ought not to consider, not only the type of worship we *like*, but also

the type of worship we *need*. If it is being more and more admitted that the different types of worship have a legitimacy, ought they not all to be provided within the one denomination and even in the one congregation? Surely it cannot be natural or healthy that we should be compelled to worship either with gorgeous ceremony or with utter bareness; with either everything, or nothing, liturgically provided; with the sacraments made everything and preaching nothing, or preaching made everything and sacraments nothing: with no place for silence, or silence made supreme. It is these extremes and oppositions in worship which make us suspicious of one another and unable to enter with any sympathy into a worship with which we are not familiar; and while this remains so, it is really impossible to secure united worship save on the lowest level. We urge that every denomination should recognise that Churches are at liberty to adopt or adapt other than their traditional forms of worship, in so far as they can be intelligently appropriated and are spiritually demanded. If only every denomination were to seek to be truly comprehensive, and set itself to explore all

that had been found valid and valuable in the practices of the others, union would become the simplest and most inevitable of all things to be undertaken. This cross filtration is taking place, but sporadically, often in a merely external and imitative manner, and without recognition of underlying principles. It needs to be done consciously and conscientiously, as sanctionable, as necessary, and as a preliminary to the union of the whole Church, on the recognition that the Churches cannot be united until they are somewhat more alike.

VIII. Our Appeal from the Free Churches to the One Church.

This book has been written with as wide an horizon as we could command, but it is written from the Free Church standpoint, and therefore makes its appeal both for and to the Free Churches. As Free Churchmen we plead firmly and yet fraternally that we shall be recognised without qualification as truly Churches of Christ. We plead for this not because, despite the consciousness of our many defects and deficiencies, we have any doubts about our belonging to the One Holy Catholic

Church, or wait for any declaration from others to make us sure; but because we feel that those who unchurch us to that same degree unchurch themselves; though we ourselves will have nothing to do with denying churchly rights to any who acknowledge our Lord Jesus Christ as their Supreme Head. It is not that we plead that we are perfect Churches or still think that we have nothing to learn from others. The days of our arrogance and exclusiveness are over. We do not even defend the position we had to take up in historical controversies as one which left all the right and patience on our side and all the persecution and arrogance on the other. But we ask for the recognition that Christ has been with us, that the signs of the Holy Ghost cannot be denied without something approximating to the unpardonable sin; and especially that there has been with us the honest intention of safeguarding what we feel to be the spiritual interests and the dearly-bought freedom of the Church of Christ. It is true that some of us are without episcopacy, some of us without connexional government, and some of us without sacraments. We are willing to agree that there must be a

place for all these things if we are ever to have unity and if we are all to be brought to the perfect stature of faith; but when it is maintained that these are absolutely essential to the transmission of spiritual life, to the constitution of the Church and the preservation of common loyalties, or that without sacraments there can be no salvation, we not only point to the facts of our history, but we maintain that it is just such arguments which make the whole case for episcopacy and sacraments impossible to consider. We appeal once more to the principle of discrimination between things primary and things secondary. It is not through unreasonable individualism, still less through pride or historical prejudice, that we press for our membership in the One Holy Catholic Church to be admitted, but because equally with the Churches which boast that they have retained the once undisputed Catholic position, we claim that we are holding by certain positions that are absolutely essential to the Catholic Church. We hold to these things, not for ourselves, but for the sake of the whole; some of us continue to stand by them, even when we should pay almost any price for peace and unity; yes, even

stand by them in anxious isolation and mournful exile, and to the exclusion of things we crave for which our own brethren would deny us, simply because they are part of the faith that was once for all delivered unto the saints.

We plead especially with our brethren of the Established Church in this country to recognise that we bear them no hostility and have forgotten all ill-will; but that our stand against Establishment is keeping us out from a fellowship with them that we fain would share, and must so keep us until it has gone. We do not mean that we shall never consider any form of national recognition of religion whatsoever; but the idea of submitting to the control of the State in matters of worship or the appointment of one's officers is to us not merely inconvenient, it is a surrender of the Crown Rights of the Redeemer.[1] We envy

[1] We welcome the Enabling Bill now (1919) before Parliament as making some advance towards freeing the Church of England from the delays and disadvantages of Parliamentary Government; but it perhaps hardly needs to be said that its proposals do not go far enough to satisfy Free Church principles, in that the Bill seems designed only to make it easier to obtain Parliamentary consent to initiate reforms, rather than to claim the right to do this without consulting Parliament at all.

the Establishment neither its prestige nor its endowments. We only desire to feel ourselves one with its saints and scholars, and to be in communion with our brethren there as elsewhere.

IX. Our Appeal from the One Church to the Free Churches.

But we have equally a message to the Free Churches, whose sins against unity have also to be confessed. It is useless to go back upon the controversies of the past; we must examine where they stand to-day. We have helped, not always with sufficient sanction, to dissipate the religious life of our land; what can we now do to gather it together again into the fellowship of a united family, and to inspire a united crusade against the unbelief and carelessness which are fast taking away from our country any right whatever to be called Christian? Free Churchmen must re-examine their insistence upon certain protests and practices in the light of the experiences and decisions of the whole Church; they must do more than maintain their testimony; they must show their actual ability to produce a full-orbed Christian character; they must show that they

are alive to the re-adjustments of thought and the needs of the age which all Churches are alike facing.

We believe it will be found that the insistence upon a particular truth or type of experience, is not only in danger of exaggeration and one-sidedness, but that the truth thus over-emphasised, or left unbalanced by other truth, tends to breed reaction or lose its meaning altogether. For instance, it is doubtful whether the insistence upon a certain type of evangelical experience as a necessary preliminary to admission to Church membership has not helped to inhibit rather than to create that experience. We may claim that it is this experience that founded and keeps alive the Church ; but we are ceasing to keep it alive, and the idea that *any* experience is now counted necessary to Church membership would, we fear, on enquiry be found to be very laxly applied. The truth is that what was supposed to be the condition of membership in the Free Churches is one that has become largely inoperative. We may dismiss a baptismal franchise as inadequate ; but some of us have not only very little else : we have not even that. We must face the alternatives

of going back to our old position, or confess that it has in practice been found impossible. We shall probably find that it is by keeping alight the central fires of devotion and dedication, and by more positive teaching on the practice or demands of church membership, rather than by over-guarding the entrance, that unworthy invasion will be prevented.

In the same way we ought to re-examine our attitude with regard to episcopacy, orders, sacraments and liturgies, and see whether we have not already considerably modified our position; we ought to take note, wherever it is the case, of any wider interpretation of these things elsewhere, and see whether it is not possible for us to meet these interpretations along the true and proper lines of our own development and spiritual understanding. While some of the Catholic Churches have been reconstructing their theory of priesthood so as to bring out its representative character, and their theory of sacraments, so as to bring out their mystical value, we have ourselves made hardly any conscious approach. We tend to adopt customs and practices which really approximate to the other side, and yet without

any very clear idea of the principles involved, and sometimes with the impression that we have not yielded ground anywhere. The need for connexional order is now being felt even in the most independent systems; something approaching a demand for official ordination is recognised; persons are set aside for functions which are really episcopal; symbols and liturgies are introduced into worship. And yet this is often done without any clear recognition of the principles involved or the principles surrendered. The Free Churches are not at present playing an adequate part in the gradual rapprochement; and together with other intransigeant Churches they must bear the blame of hindering re-union.

Especially would we urge upon the rank and file of the Free Churches to remove the veto upon the adoption of any healthful practice of other Churches simply because it is *their* practice, and to abandon, once for all, the insinuation that those who do so ought to change their camp. We can surely crave something of the objectivity of the Sacramental Presence and its divinely covenanted grace; we can acknowledge the need for more reverence and more

opportunity for expressing devotion in our worship; we ought to find some place for the confession of the great central verities of our faith; and all this without being suspected of holding that no other channels of grace exist, of being unfaithful to those who purchased our freedom from coercive forms, or of abandoning the principle of thinking for ourselves. To take over that which is vital to the experience of other Churches does not mean that we thereby become disloyal to what is vital to our own. The one loyalty does not eclipse or compete with the other; but it is taken up into the larger loyalty to the whole Christ and the universal Church.

We urge also that the principle should be definitely admitted that, while the full and final expression of faith can only be set forth in saintly character and a redeemed social order, the mind and soul crave the right to express aspirations which cannot always be embodied immediately in life, but will be embodied all the sooner for their expression in worship. We must know clearly to what ultimate realities our faith commits us, if we are going confidently to recommend their application to the social and economic realm. We

must have an articulated system of fundamental theology and get rid of the suspicion of dogma. We must be able to express our longing after the beauty of holiness and to set forth the supernatural character of grace; and this demands something besides sermons, the singing of hymns and the silent following (or not following) of the minister's extempore prayers. We plead that the great principle that the Word became flesh should be extended to cover all thought and expression, and we ask for a final emancipation from the traditional prejudices which have deprived our worship of so much that is beautiful and helpful under the fear that the senses, or at least all the senses save hearing, are dangerous and beyond being sanctified and made the media of spiritual suggestion and divine communication.

Finally we plead that the only *raison d'être* of the Free Churches is that they exist to serve the full ideal of the Church as One, Catholic and Holy. This is not always borne in mind; for while we are often loud in insisting that we have a contribution to make, we do not seem equally concerned to see that the contribution is actually poured into the common stock.

We call upon our officials, on the rank and file of the ministry, and upon all our fellow-members, to make this ideal the object of our prayers and its realisation the thing for which we shall spend our lives. Let us consider ourselves first and foremost as members of the One Church; let us guide all our thought and action by its total experience; let us repudiate all that cuts us off from the communion of the saints, whether on earth or in heaven: let us refrain from anything in word or in deed that would deny the Christian name to others, even though they deny it to us; let us play our part in every movement in which our unity can be expressed; and even when some hoped-for plan immediately fails, or we are rebuffed by those who call themselves Catholics only for strife or contention, let us still believe that Christ's latest prayer shall yet be fulfilled; and in all charity and comprehensiveness, in our private prayers and in our public utterances, let us strive, not by dogmatic claim, but by example, to deserve the name "catholic," to earn the description "holy" and to show ourselves already in goodwill and intention "one" with all who name the name of Christ.

APPENDIX A

THE STUDY OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

I. The Questions for Study

A short classified bibliography is printed in the following pages for the use of those who wish to study the matter further.

More important, however, than the study of books is the study of the spoken testimonies of men and women who represent different Churches and are ready to say what their Churches mean to them. Any group met to study the subject of Christian Unity will do well to begin by hearing and cross-examining such witnesses.

The following are a number of the questions which experience proves to be the chief questions at issue between the Churches and therefore the chief questions to raise in discussion and remember in study.

The British Joint Sub-committee on Faith and Order defines them briefly as follows :

(1) As regards the nature of this visible Society, how far it involves uniformity or allows variety in polity, creed and worship.

(2) As regards the Sacraments—the conditions, objective and subjective, in their ministration and reception on which their validity depends.

(3) As regards the Ministry—whether it derives its authority through an episcopal or a presbyterial succession or through the community of believers or by a combination of these.

For purposes of discussion these questions may be profitably subdivided, as they are below :

1. *Concerning any Church.*

1. For what particular truth or practice does it stand ?

2. Upon what marks of a true Church does it insist ?

3. Against what perversion of the idea of the Church does it protest ?

4. Does experience prove that its principles work out in practice broadly as they are meant to do ?

5. In what directions is it possible to develop the practice of the Church so as to incorporate elements of value found in other Churches.

(*a*) In Church government and administration.

(*b*) In Public Worship and Ritual.

(*c*) In the Training of youth for Church membership.

2. *Concerning the Sacraments.*

1. What do we value, or what do we find lacking, in our distinctive type of Communion Service ?

2. How far, and in what sense, are we entitled to speak of a special ' gift ' as ' promised ' in the Holy Communion ?

(*a*) Is the Grace communicated in Sacraments different in kind from that communicated in other ways ?

(*b*) Is it any less dependent on moral and spiritual preparedness ? If so, how is it different and what is our warrant for so believing ?

3. Granting that spiritual grace is received through true participation in the Communion, what do we understand to be its specific nature when it is described as the *body* and *blood* of Christ ?

(*a*) Why did Christ speak of Body and Blood at all at the Last Supper, and not rather, as in John vi., of " eating Me " ?

(*b*) How is the body of Christ related to the elements in the Holy Communion ?

4. If the Apostolic writers were living to-day, would they have used the same language to describe their experience and doctrine of Holy Communion (so far as we have evidence on the point at all, *e.g.* in I Cor. x. 16, xi. 27) : or would their account of it have been more psychological—possibly in terms of the humanity of Christ rather than of His Body ?

5. What is the precise meaning and effect of ' consecration ' of the elements ?

6. What exactly, if anything, depends upon the officiating minister being episcopally ordained ?

3. *Concerning the Membership and Ministry of the Church.*

1. If it be held that the Church is primarily composed of those individuals, and those only, who have responded to the grace of God bestowed in Christ, and that any company of these has authority to represent Christ upon earth.

(*a*) What is that spiritual condition or experience which is to be regarded as decisive of fitness for Church membership ?

(*b*) What tests are available which can successfully disclose whether men possess this vital experience ?

(*c*) Granted that what is required is the adoption of a certain attitude to Christ, rather than any elaborate credal or other test, should some personal confession, however simple, be demanded of the adult as a condition of membership? Or should any moral test be applied to character or conduct as a condition of entering or retaining Church membership?

(*d*) Does birth in a Christian family, followed normally by infant baptism, give a *prima facie* title to membership? Or should confirmation, or some equivalent or more self-conscious form of personal adhesion, be required also?

2. If, on the other hand, the Church is regarded rather as constituted by its whole tradition duly preserved, and its official representatives duly ordained.

(*a*) What things have orders actually succeeded in safeguarding and preserving in the Church?

(*b*) Can the special authority of those in orders be maintained without detracting from the inspiration of the Spirit which every Christian may claim, and from the freedom of God to pour His grace into individual hearts through any and every channel of human life?

3. In whom is vested the power which the New Testament Church claimed to cast out devils, cure sickness, deliver men from sin, grant forgiveness, and give authority to the ministry of teaching.

(*a*) In a separate order or priesthood?

(*b*) In the whole body of the members, showing itself in a diversity of ministrations, all of them authoritative and sacramental? Can you give examples?

(*c*) Or otherwise?

4. In any individual case, upon what conditions does this power of communicating grace depend ?

(*a*) Upon any moral or spiritual conditions personal to the man himself, or upon his agreement with the historic faith ?

(*b*) Upon the fact of his appointment, supposing that to be valid, or upon any fixed mode of appointment ?

(*c*) Upon the concurrence and spiritual fellowship with him of the local Church ?

II. Bibliography

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APPENDIX B

INTERDENOMINATIONAL FELLOWSHIPS

THE following documents set forth the basis and aim of a number of Christian Fellowships formed recently for the purposes advocated in Chapter VI. (p. 139). The Anglican and Free Church Fellowships are co-operating with the Auxiliary of the Student Christian Movement for the promotion of others.

I

THE ABINGDON CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

Its Basis.

It consists of men and women who claim the name of "Christian," in membership of some Christian Society.

Who recognise the fact that on many points their interpretations of the meaning of the name "Christian," and of what it involves, differ widely in regard to belief, practice, and organisation.

But Who are At One:

(*a*) In their desire for mutual charity, and understanding of one another's positions, so that they may "provoke one another to love and good works."

(*b*) In their desire for opportunities of united Prayer and Bible Study.

(*c*) In their desire to keep before their minds, as a practical outcome of all Christian belief, the importance and urgency (1) of the evangelisation of the world; (2) of the Christian solution of social problems; and (3) of the permeation of public life with Christian ideals.

(*d*) In their belief that if they try to be faithful to the leading of God's Holy Spirit, He will show them what is true and what is false in their interpretations of Christianity, and so He will prepare the way for that unity for which our Lord Jesus Christ prayed.

Its Method of Work.

Regular Meetings of the members with a view to the fulfilment of these desires, and the carrying out of any united action to which they may be guided.

II

Mid and West Herts Christian Fellowships

Basis:

1. That it is the will of God that we should bring the spirit of Christ to bear upon all the problems of our common life, in such a way that His Kingdom may come upon earth, in our own nation and neighbourhood.

2. That in this enterprise we are bound to unite in fellowship with all, whether within the Church or without, who look and strive for a new world refashioned according to the mind of Christ.

3. That to those who are so united in a fellowship of earnest prayer and thought, who seek the truth with loyalty to all that they have already learned and with expectation of further revelation, the spirit of Christ will be given and the mind of Christ will be revealed.

APPENDIX C

SOME RECENT MANIFESTOES ON REUNION

I

The Mansfield Manifesto

The following resolutions (amongst others) were passed by a distinguished company of Anglicans and Freechurchmen, meeting at Mansfield College, Oxford, in January, 1919, and were by them passed on to their respective Church authorities. The resolutions are quoted in full in *Towards Reunion* (Macmillan, 1919, 7s. 6d.), a volume of Essays contributed by a dozen or more members of the Conference.

(ii) " We are in entire accord in our mutual Recognition of the Communions to which we belong as Christian Churches, Members of the One Body of Christ; and we record our judgment that this Recognition is fundamental for any approach towards the realisation of that Reunited Church, for which we long and labour and pray.

(iii) " We hold that this Recognition must involve, for its due expression, reciprocal participation in the Holy Communion, as a testimony to the Unity of the Body of Christ.

(iv) " We recognise, with the Sub-Committee of ' Faith and Order,' in its Second Interim Report, the place which a

reformed Episcopacy must hold in the ultimate Constitution of the Reunited Church; and we do not doubt that the Spirit of God will lead the Churches of Christ, if resolved on Reunion, to such a Constitution as will also fully conserve the essential values of the other historical types of Church Polity, Presbyterian, Congregational and Methodist.

(v) "As immediate practical means of furthering this movement towards Unity, we desire to advocate interchange of pulpits, under proper authority; gatherings of Churchmen and Nonconformists for more intimate fellowship through common study and prayer; association in common work through Local Conferences, Joint Missions, Joint Literature and Inter-denominational Committees for social work."

II

"Faith and Order" Manifestoes

Extracted from the Interim Reports of the Sub-committee appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York's Committee and by Representatives of the English Free Churches' Commissions in connection with the proposed world conference on Faith and Order.

On matters of Faith held in common by the Churches represented, the first report concludes that:

(5) "Since Christianity offers a historical revelation of God, the coherence and sequence of Christian doctrine involve a necessary synthesis of idea and fact such as is presented to us in the New Testament and in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds: and these Creeds both in their statements of historical fact and in their statements of doctrine affirm essential elements of the Christian faith, as contained

in Scripture, which the Church could never abandon without abandoning its basis in the word of God."

On matters of Order, agreement is reported as follows:

(1) "That it is the purpose of our Lord that believers in Him should be, as in the beginning they were, one visible society—His body with many members—which in every age and place should maintain the communion of saints in the unity of the Spirit and should be capable of a common witness and a common activity.

(2) "That our Lord ordained, in addition to the preaching of His Gospel, the Sacraments of Baptism and of the Lord's Supper, as not only declaratory symbols, but also effective channels of His grace and gifts for the salvation and sanctification of men, and that these Sacraments being essentially social ordinances were intended to affirm the obligation of corporate fellowship as well as individual confession of Him.

(3) "That our Lord, in addition to the bestowal of the Holy Spirit in a variety of gifts and graces upon the whole Church also conferred upon it by the self-same Spirit a Ministry of manifold gifts and functions, to maintain the unity and continuity of its witness and work."

The Second Report *on matters of Order* goes further in proposing the following basis of agreement for securing unity in Church organisation:

1. "That continuity with the historic Episcopate should be effectively preserved.

2. "That in order that the rights and responsibilities of the whole Christian community in the government of the Church may be adequately recognised, the Episcopate should re-assume a constitutional form, both as regards

the method of the election of the bishop as by clergy and people, and the method of government after election. . . .

3. "That acceptance of the fact of Episcopacy and not any theory as to its character should be all that is asked for.

"The acceptance of Episcopacy on these terms should not involve any Christian community in the necessity of disowning its past, but should enable all to maintain the continuity of their witness and influence as heirs and trustees of types of Christian thought, life and order, not only of value to themselves but of value to the Church as a whole. Accordingly we hope and desire that each of these Communions would bring its own distinctive contribution, not only to the common life of the Church, but also to its methods of organisation. . . .

"Within such a recovered unity we should agree in claiming that the legitimate freedom of prophetic ministry should be carefully preserved; and in anticipating that many customs and institutions which have been developed in separate communities may be preserved within the larger unity of which they have come to form a part."

The full text of these reports can be obtained from the Oxford University Press, price 1½d. each.

III

DECLARATORY STATEMENT OF THE COMMON FAITH AND PRACTICE OF THE EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCHES OF ENGLAND.[1]

I

THERE is One Living and True God, Who is revealed to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit; Him alone we worship and adore.

II

We believe that God so loved the world as to give His Son to be the Revealer of the Father and the Redeemer of mankind; that the Son of God, for us men and for our salvation, became man in Jesus Christ, Who, having lived on earth the perfect human life, died for our sins, rose again from the dead, and now is exalted Lord over all; and that the Holy Spirit, Who witnesses to us of Christ, makes the salvation which is in Him to be effective in our hearts and lives.

III

We acknowledge that all men are sinful, and unable to deliver themselves from either the guilt or power of their sin; but we have received and rejoice in the Gospel of the grace of the Holy God, wherein all who truly turn from sin are freely forgiven through faith in our Lord Jesus

[1] For further information see the Interim Reports of the Four Committees for the Federation of the Evangelical Free Churches, which can be obtained from Dr. F. B. Meyer, Memorial Hall, Farringdon St., E.C. 4. Price 3d., postage extra.

Christ, and are called and enabled, through the Spirit dwelling and working within them, to live in fellowship with God and for His service ; and in this new life, which is to be nurtured by the right use of the means of grace, we are to grow, daily dying unto sin and living unto Him Who in His mercy has redeemed us.

IV

We believe that the Catholic or Universal Church is the whole company of the redeemed in heaven and on earth, and we recognise as belonging to this holy fellowship all who are united to God through faith in Christ.

The Church on earth—which is One through the Apostolic Gospel and through the living union of all its true members with its one Head, even Christ, and which is Holy through the indwelling Holy Spirit Who sanctifies the Body and its members—is ordained to be the visible Body of Christ, to worship God through Him, to promote the fellowship of His people and the ends of His Kingdom, and to go into all the world and proclaim His Gospel for the salvation of men and the brotherhood of all mankind. Of this visible Church, and every branch thereof, the only Head is the Lord Jesus Christ ; and in its faith, order, discipline and duty, it must be free to obey Him alone as it interprets His holy will.

V

We receive, as given by the Lord to His Church on earth, the Holy Scriptures, the Sacraments of the Gospel, and the Christian Ministry.

The Scriptures, delivered through men moved by the Holy Ghost, record and interpret the revelation of redemp-

tion, and contain the sure Word of God concerning our salvation and all things necessary thereto. Of this we are convinced by the witness of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men to and with the Word ; and this Spirit, thus speaking from the Scriptures to believers and to the Church, is the supreme Authority by which all opinions in religion are finally to be judged.

The Sacraments—Baptism and the Lord's Supper—are instituted by Christ, Who is Himself certainly and really present in His own ordinances (though not bodily in the elements thereof), and are signs and seals of His Gospel not to be separated therefrom. They confirm the promises and gifts of salvation, and, when rightly used by believers with faith and prayer, are, through the operation of the Holy Spirit, true means of grace.

The Ministry is an office within the Church—not a sacerdotal order—instituted for the preaching of the Word, the ministration of the Sacraments and the care of souls. It is a vocation from God, upon which therefore no one is qualified to enter save through the call of the Holy Spirit in the heart ; and this inward call is to be authenticated by the call of the Church, which is followed by ordination to the work of the Ministry in the name of the Church. While thus maintaining the Ministry as an office, we do not limit the ministries of the New Testament to those who are thus ordained, but affirm the priesthood of all believers and the obligation resting upon them to fulfil their vocation according to the gift bestowed upon them by the Holy Spirit.

VI

We affirm the sovereign authority of our Lord Jesus Christ over every department of human life, and we hold

that individuals and peoples are responsible to Him in their several spheres and are bound to render Him obedience and to seek always the furtherance of His Kingdom upon earth, not, however, in any way constraining belief, imposing religious disabilities, or denying the rights of conscience.

VII

In the assurance, given us in the Gospel, of the love of God our Father to each of us and to all men, and in the faith that Jesus Christ, Who died, overcame death and has passed into the heavens, the first-fruits of them that sleep, we are made confident of the hope of Immortality, and trust to God our souls and the souls of the departed. We believe that the whole world must stand before the final Judgment of the Lord Jesus Christ. And, with glad and solemn hearts, we look for the consummation and bliss of the life everlasting, wherein the people of God, freed for ever from sorrow and from sin, shall serve Him and see His face in the perfected communion of all saints in the Church triumphant.

These things, as all else in our Christian faith, we hold in reverent submission to the guidance and teaching of the Holy Spirit Who is Truth, and we shall ever seek of Him enlightenment and grace both to unlearn our errors and also more fully to learn the mind and will of God Whom to know is life eternal and to serve is perfect freedom.

And, being thus called of God unto the purpose of His redeeming love wherein He is delivering the world from sin and misery and is reconciling all things to Himself in Christ Jesus, and being animated with faith in the final triumph of our Lord, we set before us as our end and aim,

to carry the Gospel to every creature and to serve and establish, in our land and throughout the earth, His reign of righteousness, joy and peace.

Grace be with all those that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. And to God be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

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